

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Matthew 5:27-32
“The Heart Of The Matter”

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(1st Sunday In Lent)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIID2,3: MATTHEW 5:27-32
"THE HEART OF THE MATTER"

Divine Image: Murder/Anger (5:17-26), Then Sex/Lust (5:27-32)

2-3. 5:27-32 APPLICATION OF THE GREATER RIGHTEOUSNESS PRINCIPLE: LUST, DIVORCE.

Jesus/Matthew Spoke In Specific Social Contexts

1) vv.27-28 Adultery And The Imagination Of The Heart (M). vv.27-28 = Special Matthew (M)

Unconditional Fidelity Only Required Of Wife, Gen. 38:24-26, Num. 5

a) v.27 What The Law Of Moses: Ex. 20:14, Deut. 5:18, 22:22-27; Lev. 20:1-20. Property Crime

Prov. 6:32, Heart Guards Integrity Of Marriage, Deepens Moses

Action

27

"You have heard that it was said,

Short Form, Male Privilege, Man & Married Woman, Rights Of Neighbor

'You shall not commit adultery.'

Command 7, Apodictic Law (Courts Not Deal With Intent), Always Wrong, Law Quoted

(Commands, 7, 10), Early Application Was To Wives Only, Protect Husband's Rights

b) v.28 Jesus' Heart Level Radicalization Of Marital Fidelity: Intent. Warns Disciples, Female Disciples

Not An Attack On Human Biology; Deliberate Leer At Wife Of Another, = Guard Marriage

Intent

28

But I say to you

(you sing.) vs. Islam: Problem = *His* Heart, Not Her Beauty Law Radicalized

that *every one* who looks (continually) at a woman (wife) lustfully (to covet)

No. 10 + 6, Disordered Desire, Female Dignity

has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

//15:19, Bridge From Fantasy To Deed, Job 31:1-2, 2 Pt. 2:14

Jam. 1:15, Job 31:1, 9; Possibility For Women? Not Original: Many Parallels

2) vv.29 Radical Surgery For Sexual Sin: The Eye, Hell Invoked (Mk. 9:43-47)).

Intent

29

If your *right* eye causes you to sin (stumble),

2 Examples: Be Whole! *Look As Bridge To Eye* = Less Advanced, Two Examples

pluck it out *and throw it away*;

Mt. 18:8-9//Mk. 9:47(eye), 43 (hand), Num. 15:39, Ezek. 20:7-8

it is better that you lose one of your members

Sir. 9:8, Test. Iss. 4:53, 7:2, Lev. Rab. 23:12, Take Action Against Yourself

than that your whole body be thrown into hell (Gehenna).

Call = To Radical Integration Around A New Center

p.v. (God), Misuse Of A Human Being Is Damnable

Do What You Must *Now* To Avoid An Awful End

Action

30

And if your *right* hand causes you to sin (stumble),

2') v.30 Radical Surgery For Sexual Sin: Hand: Hell Invoked. More-Advanced, J. Martyr *Apol.* 1.15.2

cut it off *and throw it away*;

vv.29-30 Originally Applied To All Sin, Mk. 9:43-4, Hand/Foot/Eye

it is better that you lose one of your members

Theft, *Right Side* Was More Respectable In Antiquity

than that your whole body go into hell (Gehenna).

Distance Yourself, A Mutilated Stump Can Still Hide A Wicked Heart

A Radical Choice, Now And Later, God Confirms Our Trajectory

Dealing With Part Not Deal The Heart, Mk. 7:21-23

We Need Friendship, Respect And Love Between Men And Women

1') vv.31-32 Adultery And Divorce (Q).

//Q (Lk. 16:18), Mk. 10:2-4, 11-12, 1 Cor. 7:10

Husbands Had Assumed Right To *Put Away* Their Wife, Issue = Grounds

a) v.31 What The Law Of Moses Said: Deut. 24:1-4, Lev. 19:12.

Mal. 2:13-16, Scribal Debate

m. Gitt. 9.3, "Lo, you are free to marry any man." Male Privilege Presumed, Law Quoted

31

"It was also said,

Shortest Form, Assumes Male Privilege, No Torah Command Against Divorce

'Whoever divorces his wife,

Current Rabbinic Debate Over Grounds For Divorce: Hillel, Shammai

let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

Post-Divorce Legal Status For Women, No Adultery Charge For New Husband

Casuistic Law, Level Of Protection, Permits Remarriage

b) v.32 Jesus' Radicalization In Jewish Setting Of Male Privilege.

//19:4-9, Such A Writ Does Not Protect

Writ Does Not Protect, Jesus Is Not Giving Individual Pastoral Care, Law Radicalized

32

But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife,

Bond Continues, Assumes Remarriage, Man As Initiator

except on the ground of unchastity (Gk. *porneia*),

= *Illicit Sex, Uncleaness* (Disputed Meaning), //19:9, = Shammai

makes her an adulteress;

Infidelity? Or The Incest Of Marriage Within Prohibited Degrees? Lev. 18:16-18

and whoever marries a divorced woman

If One Exception, Are There Others? Abandonment? (1 Cor. 7:15)?

commits adultery.

Adultery = Adulterate = Breaks The Bond, Loss Of Integrity, Purity

Unmarried Women Had No Status In This Culture And Few Options

Jesus Did Not Do Away With Divorce Or Its Legal Regulation, Demonstrates Its Effects, Upheld Marital Sanctity

As A Prophet Jesus Proclaimed Prohibition Of Divorce As The Will Of God, Mal. 2:14-16

Marriage Is Not Only A Contract, But A Covenant Structure Of Creation, A Gift Of God To Humans

Is It *Marriage May Not Be Dissolved?* Or *Marriage Cannot Be Dissolved?* Is It Ontological Or Only Functional?

If You Make A Habit Of Cultivating Lust, You Will Not Be At Home In The Kingdom Of God

Church As A Safe Place

Not Passive Victims, Love Is Not Predatory, We Are To Control Our Imaginations! Disciples No Not Violate The Bonds Of Marriage

A Brief Treatment Of Matthew 5:27-32

The next two antitheses (5:27-30, 5:31-32) are grouped as a single thought unit with the use of double references to adultery (*adultery, adultery* [vv.27b, 28c] // *adulteress, adultery* [vv.32a, b]) as inclusions and by the parallel anthesis formulae *You have heard that it was said.... But I say to you* (vv.27a, 28a) // *It was also said.... But I say to you* (vv.31a, 32a) as frames. Since vv.29, 30 are structured in four parallel clauses each, they form the double center of a 4:2 concentric pattern (1-2 // 2'-1') in which the two outer elements (1. vv.27-28, 1' vv.31-32) frame the two central elements (2. v.29 // 2' v.30). A source analysis demonstrates that vv.27-28 are unique to Matthew (M). Verses 29-30 are adapted from Mk. 9:43-48 where Matthew has taken Mark's three statements concerning to the avoidance of sin (hand/eye/foot), omitted the foot statement as not applicable to his concern about lust, and reversed the order of Mark's hand and eye statements to form a link with the phrase *every one who looks* of v.28b. Verses 31-32 echo Lk. 16:18 as Q material. This thought unit weaves together sources from M, Mark, and Q into an integrated whole.

The first antithesis (5:21-26) dealt with the act of murder and the internal anger which is its igniting source. Anger, not just murder, makes one liable before God who knows the heart. The same strategy of deepening Torah commands is evident in the link between the prohibited act of adultery (the seventh commandment) and the internal reality of deliberately cultivated lust. Since persons bear the image of God, murder and lust are both attacks on the dignity of the image. A *Thou* is treated as an *It*, as something that may be disposed of. Note that the Ten Commandments contain three commands related to the worth of marriage : No. 5, honor your father and mother; No. 7, *no adultery*; No. 10, *no coveting your neighbor's wife*. In the company of Jesus and with the empowerment of the Spirit, disciples not only obey the commandments but fulfill them at the level of intent with a new heart. In his company we become new people with new capacities for insight and self-control; we begin to see with eyes of love and wisdom. We uphold marriage as a sacred covenant by channeling erotic desire into our own marriage and refusing to cultivate fantasies about other partners. The virtue of self-control is here applied to the imagination and thoughts. That most Jewish men of the day were married means Jesus was addressing males who had a legitimate outlet. And, in a world that often blamed women for men's lack of self-control (as in parts of the Muslim world today), Jesus placed the blame squarely on the guys. The issue is not her beauty but your lustful eye! This must have been a refreshing perspective to the women who followed Jesus. They were not to blame for every leer that came their way. The accompanying issue of appropriate modesty is not dealt with here, neither the issue of women needing the same teaching against lust. The discipline of vv.29-30 is no less radical because the form is hyperbolic. Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation but a radical integration of the self around him and his teaching. "Do what you must to discipline your thought life." To cultivate the habits of lust and the actions that follow will, over time, make you into the kind of person who is himself disposable by God (vv.29c, 30d). Treat others as trash, and God will do the same to you. This is a battle you must win, and since Jesus made it public, his help is available for retraining.

Divorce in Jesus day was a male privilege, and the reigning debate was about the grounds for dismissal. Deut. 24:1-4 allowed a man to divorce for *some indecency* (the debated issue); he was required to give his wife written proof of her dismissal so neither she nor a next husband were adulterous. This led to a widespread practice of husbands casually divorcing wives *for any cause*, even trivial ones, not because the wife cheated. Serial monogamy was common. Jesus reasons that if the wife is dismissed for a cause other than adultery (which breaks the bond), then the original marriage bond still exists, and so a future marriage is *prima facie* adulterous. Jesus upholds marriage on several fronts in ways that defend women. They are not objects of lust and are not to be traded like used cars. They too bear the divine image.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away.”

Moral growth requires radical solutions and serious personal pruning.

M A T T H E W 5 : 2 9 a

The 1998 movie *Hope Floats* is about a woman struggling to recover from her husband's infidelity. Birdie Pruitt (played by Sandra Bullock), thinks she's going to receive a makeover on a national TV talk show, only to discover the real purpose is to uncover her husband's affair with her best friend. Horrified, Birdie returns to her small-town Texas home to put life back together. There she faces considerable obstacles and the potential rebirth of an old high school romance.

Towards the end of the film, Birdie and her husband argue loudly in front of their daughter about the pain, deceit, and anger his adultery caused. She shouts, "I would have stayed with you forever. I would have turned myself inside out for you!"

Bill won't hear it. He says he finally found happiness for himself, and he's going to take it.

Finally, Birdie tells him to leave since she's got the best part of him anyway, namely, their daughter Bernice. Bill turns to go, and is pursued by Bernice down the stairs and out to the car. She calls out, "I'm coming with you, Daddy!" but her dad keeps walking. The girl, terrified of losing her father, tries to get in the car with him, begging, "Daddy, I need you!" but he refuses.

He says sternly, "I promise to come back for you, but I'm starting a new life with Connie now."

As she screams and sobs, his raised voice has an empty ring as he keeps repeating, "I promise. . .I promise. . .I promise." With that he drives off, leaving Bernice completely devastated, wailing until her mom comes and picks her up.¹

How many times has that scene been repeated in our lifetime? This is what God wants his people to avoid. And it's why- when you narrow it down to ten- this

¹

¹ PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 5:27-32.

had better be one of them, “You shall not commit adultery.”² No predators, no home-wreckers. *No adultery* is a boundary to protect something fragile and precious and warmly human, and the promise hidden in the command is that the best is to be found at home, which it is your responsibility to nurture since you took those precious promises. Remember them? “.. to have and to hold from this day forward... to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.” If Lori doesn’t feel cherished, I’m not doing my job!

Don’t look elsewhere for life and joy; develop the character and the understanding, the prayer and the love to keep the home fires burning. And when the words of Jesus are invoked at every Christian wedding, “Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder,”³ the intent is to warn all present that to undermine your own marriage or that of another is to make God your enemy, a God who is fully able to frustrate your hopes and dreams at every turn.

And why? Because you have discounted and defaced something God created, the potential for which is stamped into our gendered bodies. The hardware of Christian marriage is undeniable biological complementary; the software is a relationship between a man and woman that builds towards a publically blessed marriage that is consummated and celebrated in private the rest of their days. This is God’s work and a great gift to the human family: for children to be raised in the faith, for the channeling of our unruly passions into a single deep relationship, and for building the little societies and economies we call families of which a stable culture is composed.⁴ What ballast does for a sailing vessel, stable marriages do for a culture; they keep us from tipping over. All the studies show that children do better with married biological parents.⁵ We know that, as do all school teachers, even if we’re hesitant to say so in our politically correct world that denies the truth and is embracing all sort of social experiments to redefine the family apart from moral

² For a thorough analysis, see Donald Miller, *The Ten Commandments* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2010), Chapter 6, “Marriage, Sex, And The Neighbor,” 271-316.

³ Mark 10:9.

⁴ These are the three purposes found in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* service; this preface is preserved in the 1784 *Sunday Service* that John Wesley sent to America.

⁵ For a full accounting, see *The State of Our Unions: Marriage in America 2012* (Charlottesville, VA: The National Marriage Project, 2012), www.stateofourunions.org.

categories and the witness of natural law. What if the next social fad based on rights and feelings is the return of polygamy?⁶ *The revenge of the Mormons!* Because once you do away the necessity of complementary genders, why not the number *two*? Why not three or four or more in any combination? Christian marriage is two of different genders, male and female, as Scripture and church marriage liturgies make clear. And if the gender criterion is optional, why not the whole idea of a bonded pair? The logic seems impeccable to me, and you can bet some sharp lawyer will press it logical consistency in the name of equal protection. The crazy new frontier in America is family law, and I expect it to get only more bizarre, which is why the church must stick to our convictions so that when the world gets sick and tired of the chaos and pain it's created, they have somewhere to return for the sanity of truth.

Yes, there is forgiveness when there is repentance and restitution after adultery- though the marriage may not survive- but one of the hidden stories of our world is the wrath of God that follows people who have crossed this line and never faced before God the crime they committed and the inter-generational pain it causes. "Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder," is a warning, as if it was a seal on an ancient temple that it was not to be violated lest a blight come upon the intruders. It is a sin to violate the marriage of another; it is a sin to let your own marriage rot by neglect and sloth and ignorance and being too prideful to ask for help. God is pro-marriage it is high time we recreated a pro-marriage culture in the church. Why are we so silent amidst the wreckage? When did we lose our nerve?

But *no adultery* is not the only pro-marriage commandment in the *Big Ten*. How about the fifth? "Honor your father and mother..." What's that but the recognition and honoring of their marriage? How about the tenth? "You shall not covet your neighbors' house *or your neighbor's wife...*" which goes beyond wrong action to a corrupted imagination. If God added a footnote to the tenth, it might read:

"No porn in the homes of my people. No *Fifty Shades Of Grey* on the bedside table. Nothing dangerous or shameful or demeaning. Put your best energies into your own marriage; become a great lover; do whatever you have to do to avoid a wandering eye because if you make lust a habit of character, you will not endure the light of my kingdom."

⁶ M. Vorwerck , "Polygamists find promise in Supreme Court decisions," *USA Today*, www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/06/28/polygamy-supreme-court/2473157.

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Jesus is clear: you simply do not want to become the kind of person who sees other men and women as disposables, and that is what our culture does by saturating us in hyper-sensual, erotic imagery. People have inherent dignity because they bear the image of God and because Jesus thought them worth coming and dying for. To treat them as a collection of attractive and disposable parts is moral evil; it's not innocent and harmless but has permanent negative effects on all involved. It's an industry that degrades and mocks the tenderest feelings of which we are capable, passions God designed through neuro-chemistry to glue and man and woman together forever in a durable bond. I recently read that about 56 percent of divorces in American involve a partner with a serious porn addiction, and 68 percent an affair that started on the internet.⁷ Can you imagine the pain and shame of that? Sewage is now piped into all our homes. You can sign up on websites for a service that will help you find an adulterous partner. Who will say No to insanity? It is now certain that many churches have neither the courage or conviction to do anything but go with the flow, to- in effect- merge with the culture, except for the Catholics and Baptists whose stiff spines I admire, and I am grateful for our church which remains within the bounds of apostolic faith and practice.

The temptation to lust and adultery has always been there, which is why Jesus instructed his disciples clearly why the moral cancer of lust must be named and cut out, but there never has been a time in history till recently with the digital revolution when with the click of a mouse a teenage boy or a grown man, or increasingly a teenage girl or adult women, could immerse themselves in an unending variety of graphic portrayals, which we are learning from recent studies has the power to burn new neural circuitry into the brain in a deep, insatiable addiction.⁸ We have crossed

⁷ In December 2009, the Family Research Council released a study exploring the effects of porn on marriage, children, and individuals. Citing the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, the study noted that 56 percent of divorce cases involved "one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites," while "68 percent of divorce cases involve one spouse conducting an affair with someone they met over the internet." The conclusion was that porn "corrodes the conscience, promotes distrust between husbands and wives and debases untold thousands of young women." The conclusion is that porn is "a quiet family killer" (Nathan Black, "Family Group Releases Study on Effects of Pornography," www.christianpost.com, 12-02-2009).

⁸ M. Cooper-White, "Watching Porn Linked To Less Gray Matter In The Brain," *The Huffington Post*, www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/02/porn-less-gray-matter-brain_n_5418607; Joe Carter, "Nine Things You Should Know About Pornography And

a new frontier of universal, instant availability, which some therapists term *crack cocaine for the eyes*. Our Christian perspective it not about avoiding human beauty or the perpetual dance of energy between men and women; it's not about being prudish about the body and all the pleasure circuits the Maker wired into it. It's about deliberately swimming against the strong tides of our sleazy culture and becoming a *one-woman* kind of man and *one-man* kind of woman from the inside out, and of training our young in this path to a fruitful life. It is just this kind of character transformation that Jesus enables, even in this fallen world. After all, the twelve disciples were all young Jewish men, late teens through early thirties, and most of them- like Simon Peter- already married.⁹ They left their wives for weeks, perhaps months at a time, and were on the road with Jesus and several female disciples he called.¹⁰ Such group travel was just not done in that world; it was scandalous. They left the security of village family life for an extended camping trip with Jesus who had the audacity to have women in his company, some of them with colorful histories of demonic infestation like Mary Magdalene. Where do you think today's teaching came from? What was its original setting before Matthew gathered this unit into the larger composition of the Sermon on the Mount? One evening, Jesus may have gathered the men out of earshot of the women, and it went like this:

“I’ve been watching your eyes and whispered remarks as we pass through the villages, and I say to you that “everyone who looks continually at a woman lustfully, has already committed adultery with her in his heart, and if you have to become one-eyed or left-handed. so be it. Do not become a man who turns women into objects because the garbage dump of hell is a lot hotter than the hottest flames of desire. Treat women with the dignity and love I do. They are your sisters, and you are to be different. Hear their stories; welcome their friendship; serve them and laugh with them, but keep your marriage vows by guarding your imagination. Ask the Spirit help direct your thoughts and to flash you warnings. I don’t want your wives to think your following me destroyed their lives.”

The Brain,” including two excellent videos “The Science of Pornography Addiction” and “The Great Porn Experiment,” www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-pornography-and-the-brain.

⁹ 1 Cor. 9:5.

¹⁰ Luke 8:1-3.

Now in this regard Jesus had a distinct advantage. He was the only human being uninfected with the systemic disease of sin,¹¹ which has corrupted all our capacities and twisted our bodily desires, which is why we have such trouble with gluttony and anger and addictions and lust.¹² Nothing about us is left untouched. Not our minds, not the will or passions. It's all impaired, not what it was intended to be. Our appetites were to be under our control, not us under theirs. So we are all disabled in a specialized sense, and highly vulnerable.

Jesus had the same feelings we do, including affection, and as much testosterone as any of his followers. He was tempted as we are, but he never thought of a woman as an object to be used because he saw in them an shattered image he'd come to restore. To him they were precious, and I imagine they found him profoundly attractive. He was the only whole person who ever lived, and this is one of his qualifications as Savior. Jesus was fully masculine, full of love and insight, with not a hint of lust but a love that when he looked at women went all the way to the bone. His warm touch was not a tool of seduction. Jesus was not a prude; he lived in a small village with few secrets for three decades; he heard the banter and jokes; he laughed and gained insight into human nature; he was asked over and over why he never married; he had men and women as followers on the road together where proper boundaries had to be kept. He was utterly disarming and delightfully different from anyone they'd ever met. People were drawn to his presence as they feasted on his teaching and saw what happened when he cooperated with the Father and the Spirit to heal people, not just bodies but their wounded histories and distorted images of God. He was God poured into human flesh and illumined from within by the candle of the Holy Spirit. He was master of himself, and at the same time vulnerable and open to people. To meet him was unforgettable. It still is. And in his words that Matthew collected and arranged with such care, we hear his living voice of truth.

You see, friends, according to Jesus, it's not enough to avoid killing; underneath violence is anger that Jesus exposes to the light. It's not enough to avoid

¹¹ Heb 4:15.

¹² The UM Articles of Religion, Article VII, Of Original or Birth Sin: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually" (*BOD 2012*: 65).

adultery; underneath the act is the accumulated habit of lust, which is the desire to use another for my gratification without regard for their welfare or their other commitments. Lust, and the pain and degradation that flows from it, shatters the love and respect God intends between men and women. People die from STD's; the unborn die of convenience abortions to cover promiscuity; childhood innocence dies from molestation; marriages die from adultery; reputations die because of lust when it is exposed; consciences die from accumulated toxins; respect between parents and children dies when dad's or mom's little secrets are found out. Death is everywhere lust is unchallenged. Once the Hugh Hefner philosophy of casual connections with no consequences become the norm of a generation, marriage begins to wither, as already in many European nations, and as it is beginning in Canada and the U.S.¹³

Just as greed is the shadow side of enjoying a particular thing, and just as gluttony is the perversion of the satisfaction of hunger, and just as sloth is an excess of rest without labor, so lust takes what God intended to be a permanent bond of soul-to-soul and makes it into a temporary contact of skin-to-skin. What is intended as a holy union becomes *hooking up*. The lustful think they are having a little sophisticated fun; what they are accomplishing is the step-by-step destruction of their capacity for fidelity to one person. When a wife asks me why her husband prefers pictures to her, we have to explore their history, hopefully with him present. She feels lonely; he hides in a computer cave in an addictive cycle of lust and shame. The marriage, oddly enough, dies of visual overload and sensual neglect.¹⁴ Self-control is a virtue both within marriage and before it. The unmarried practice chastity by abstaining; the married practice chastity through fidelity of thought and body to one and only one.¹⁵ An inflamed appetite is unlikely to be happy with only one partner. So beware of lust; it promises heaven and delivers hell. Jesus said so.

By God's design, when a man and woman come together, a complex bond is created, one that, in the words of C.S. Lewis, will be either eternally enjoyed or

¹³ Mercer Schuchardt, "Hugh Hefner's Hollow Ring," *Christianity Today*, 2003, www.ctlibrary.com.

¹⁴ Sheila, "Top Ten Effects Of Porn On Your Brain, Your Marriage, And Your Sex Life," <http://tolovehonorandvacuum.com/2014/03/effects-of-porn-on-your-marriage>.

¹⁵ For this bracing idea, see Laren Winter, "Sex in the Body of Christ," *Christianity Today*, May 2005, 31.

eternally endured.¹⁶ You have, biblically speaking, had as many marriages as you have had voluntary partners. Even without the formal bonds of marriage the psychological and physiological bond is formed, which is why people use the word *cheat* when their live-in is unfaithful. They feel deeply betrayed. Adultery is akin to the world *adulterate*, which means to mix something so that it loses its purity. Adultery, whether in mind or action, divides a person; it divides the loyalty of the bonds which are by design exclusive. Adulterers are cross-bonded, making promises in two worlds that they keep in neither. They are split people. Now with confession and repentance those alien bonds can be broken, but it is hard work. It is for this reason that I counsel all couples who are about to marry to go before God in private and confess all prior entanglements. Confess the fornications, ask God to forgive you and to re-gather all the parts of your heart you gave away along the way so that on your wedding day you have a whole heart to pledge in your vows.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Naming The Ugly Thing It Is (v.27-28)

The Jewish world into which Jesus came was a man's world. With few exceptions, women were considered property, and for one man to take another's wife was essentially a property crime.¹⁷ A man who seduced a single woman was not considered adulterous. It was a double standard because it was a man's world. In its original context, the seventh commandment was a warning to one Jewish man not to violate another man's holdings and perhaps set off a blood feud.¹⁸ This is confirmed in the last commandment which says that you shall not covet a neighbor's wife, or any of the other things he owns: his slaves, his ox or his donkey. In order to pass on property, men need to know who their children are, and in those days adultery was a capital offense for both parties. It may not seem very enlightened to us, but it was a vast improvement on what was practiced *before* the Ten Commandments. It was a move in the right direction, a move towards honoring marriage for God's sake. We

¹⁶ Albert Wells, Jr., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 185-186.

¹⁷ For exegetical insights, see the monographs by Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Crossroads, 1999), 58ff; Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2004), 74ff.; Scot McKnight, *The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 85ff.

¹⁸ Charles Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 83.

don't take life by killing, and we don't violate the marriages of other men. It's a starting point, not the finish line; women are not yet seen as full equals and partners. Lasting social change is very slow. A modern illusion is that it can happen quickly, perhaps by passing a law. Only in recent years has the idea of husbands and wives as full equals and companions taken hold in great numbers,¹⁹ and I for one take it to be a great advance, one which the Ten Commandments began and which Jesus shoved in the right direction. To read the Bible rightly we must not only ask what it said to its own culture but in what direction it is moving when contrasted with its surroundings. Wherever the Christian gospel is preached, there the status of women is upgraded, and it continues in that direction till they are treated as equals before the law and full partners in life. This is why the Western world with its Christian influence looks starkly different from the status of women in some Muslim countries which are even now more like the world in which the Bible was written.

We all know the difference between an innocent glance of appreciation and the leer of lust. It is said that Martin Luther quipped, "You may not keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making nests in your hair." So Jesus moves down from the level of action to the imagination of the heart, "But I say to you that everyone who continues to look at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Now Jesus' audience is married Jewish men, his disciples in particular. For them to deliberately enter into an extended fantasy about another woman is a violation of their own marriage, one God sees and judges. We must win the battle at the level of the heart and imagination, because that's where the trouble is. It is out of our heart that problems come.²⁰ The issue is not female beauty, so don't blame women or cover them with a tent; the issue Jesus addressed is male lust that will not be satisfied with learning to love one woman well all her life long. It's less demanding to stray than to keep the home fires burning. Vital marriage takes character and creativity; adultery only takes availability. To look at one's own wife

¹⁹ The egalitarian model is reflected in the rubrics of our U.M. *Service of Christian Marriage*, "Both words and actions consistently reflect the belief that husband and wife *are equal partners* in Christian marriage and that they are entering into the marriage of their own volition" (UM Hymnal: 864). This is why the giving away of the bride (originally a transfer of property) is replaced by a family and community blessing.

²⁰ Matthew 15:9.

Matthew 5:27-32 13

with desire is a virtue, one to be cultivated, and the frank truth is that many men are simply dunces when it comes to romance. I may soon offer a class on marital dating!

I love the story from the late 1970's when Phyllis George interviewed Roger Staubach. It was a dull interview till Phyllis asked, "Roger, how do you feel when you compare yourself with Joe Namath, who is so romantically active and has a different woman on his arm every time we see him?"

"Phyllis," Roger answered, "I'm just as active as Joe. The difference is that all of mine is with one woman."

Touchdown! Staubach hit the end zone with a zinger. Real men don't commit adultery; a real man sticks with one woman, physically and mentally. Period.²¹

Radical Self-Surgery (vv.29-30)

"It's cancer," the doctor says. "It will require radical surgery, followed by heavy chemo and radiation, but that's the cost of survival. You will lose all your hair and maybe die from treatment. You will feel sick for months. Are you willing to pay the price?" If you say Yes, then you go to war with your own flesh to save your life. Happens every day in the operating rooms and cancer center here in Greenwood, and the reason we do it is that life is precious. Think of Jesus as a spiritual oncologist, and look for his radical program of aggressive therapy in verses 29 and 30.

Hyperbole is exaggeration to make a point; Jesus used it as an attention getter. Gouging out eyes and cutting off hands or other organs is no answer. Jesus starts with beginners who are still at the level of imagination and then moves to the more advanced who have already touched someone with a right hand they should have kept to themselves; in other words, the same problem is addressed at increasing levels of compromise. Lust is like gravity; it always pulls people further downhill. Not all cancers of the soul are Stage 4, and blessed is the man or woman who takes early action. Stop it at the eye, and you don't have to stop it at the hand.

I have heard some say that fear is not a noble motivator and that terror is not an ethical tool; I disagree because it's a moral tactic Jesus often used. Doctors and lawyers and accountants and police use fear all the time; why not the church? We should fear the God who sees the thoughts of our hearts and who knows just when the

²¹ PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 5:27-32.

line between appreciation and lust is crossed. And if you are among the men and women who have nurtured an appetite for lust because you crave the thrill of the forbidden and the rush of adrenalin, I invite you to the only war that matters which is the one waged within yourself. You are a battlefield. God will not allow you in the long term to think of others as objects, whether you actually use them or not. The Louvre will not let you walk in with a can of Krylon and spray your initials on priceless works of art, and God promises to destroy those who deface works that bear his image, which is precious men and women. You test drive cars; you don't test drive people! We practice for the kingdom by honoring people, not by dishonoring them, and for those who habitually look at the world through lustful eyes, what is God to do when their habits have become who they are? Remember the proverb? "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."²² *Put them in the trash* is what Jesus says. The phrase *thrown into hell* in verse 29 highlights that over time we may become less human and more like refuse, while the parallel phrase *go to hell* in verse 30 may highlight that this is what people choose because it is who they have become. In the end, garbage chooses the dump!²³ And it was not fated; it was developed.

Unless the nicotine addict lays down the cigarettes and a drunk the booze, unless the obese put down the fork, unless the spender cuts up the cards in plastic surgery, and if the lustful person is not willing to put away the porn and the chase, nothing changes because for change to come something has to die, and if it will not die of neglect, then it must be actively put to death. For the sake of your future self you must go to war with your present self. "Pluck it out and throw it away.... cut it off and throw it away." Don't let an inflamed appetite be an eternal destiny.

Two Buddhist monks walked in a downpour. They came to a stream swollen out of its banks. A beautiful kimono-clad woman stood there, afraid to cross because of the currents. One of the monks said, "Can I help you?"

"I need to cross this stream."

The monk picked her up, put her on his shoulders, carried her through the

²² Attributed to Stephen Covey, www.goodreads.com/quotes/227780.

²³ For a treatment of this uncomfortable doctrine, see *The Nature of Hell* (London: The Evangelical Alliance, 2000). Also Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic Of Damnation* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992).

water, then put her down on the other side. He and his companion went on to the monastery in silence.

That night the one said to the other, "I have a bone to pick with you. We monks have taken vows not to look on a woman, much less touch her, but by the river you did both."

"My brother, I put the woman down on the other side of the river. You still carry her in your mind. Who has the problem?"²⁴

The goal of Jesus is our freedom and integrity in his company, that male and female disciples relate with honestly, that there be no harassment and a deep appreciation for our enriching differences and the lively energies of male and female. If there is a problem with lust, it's your problem, and Jesus does not mind opening up the smells and heat of hell to get your attention. This is serious business; what we do with our bodies we do with our very selves, and we are all in this together. Scripture is clear: God will judge and destroy those who treat others as objects.

Hebrews 13:4 is a verse I read often in counseling, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous." It is morally wrong for the separated to start dating before they are divorced. Why? Because it dishonors the legal component of marriage which is *to be held in honor among all*. Why should God honor you if you won't honor God? Separated on Monday, dating on Friday. No wonder such persons move from one unstable relationship to another because they are spiritually and morally unstable, like jello that never sets up. They do not understand the high value God places on marriage in all three of its layers: personal commitment, church blessing, and legal regulation. All are to be honored by all, and if not, we are dishonored.

Guarding Marriage (vv.30-32).

We said earlier that Jesus' world was a man's world. That was particularly true in the arena of divorce, when all a man had to do was write his wife a certificate to prove she was now free for any man to marry; that was the end of it. Even this seemingly brutal practice was an advance over sending her away with no legal document at all. The rabbis of that day spent much time debating whether a man might dismiss a wife for something serious like adultery only for something trivial like burning the toast,

²⁴ Edited from PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 5:27-32.

but such arguments angered Jesus who stood and announced to Jewish men that the marriage bond is permanent unless severed by adultery.²⁵ Women are not to be leered at, and you are not to casually move from one to the other. Using and throwing away women puts you at odds with God. The cultural pattern of men trading in women was something Jesus resisted publicly. He stood with women to protect their full personhood and their equal dignity under God. They have full status in his kingdom.

That Matthew in verse 32 includes a possible exception, “except on the grounds of unchastity,” indicates something other than a simple, hard line approach. The church has always had trouble implementing Jesus’ counsel. Paul added abandonment as an exception,²⁶ and we have added violence and addiction as reasons to end what was designed as permanent. What breaks the marriage vows breaks the marriage. Jesus is not offering pastoral care to individuals in tormented marriages; he’s shouting at the top of his lungs a warning that marriage and the gift of sexuality that underlies it is not to be casually dismissed; it is too powerful and too good. Christians are to lift up- and by God’s grade- live a higher standard. We must win the battle within, and only the Jesus who gave this teaching is able to heal us.

CONCLUSION

I leave you with five challenges: First, if there’s anything offensive in your home, throw it out. Secondly, read a book on addictions so you understand the process. These things come in clusters; if you have a lust problem, you probably have others as well. Third, take up the spiritual disciplines of fasting and exercise. Saying No to the cravings of my belly once a week helps restrain other appetites that threaten to get out of control; treating your body with discipline gives physical and moral strength in other areas. Fourth, find a friend who will ask tough questions and keep you honest. Finally, remember you are worth saving and that not much happens without heartfelt surrender. Something has to die. Letting convictions run your life instead of feelings and impulses is the only path to freedom. Jesus Christ waits for you to take him seriously. He has more good for you than you can imagine. This is not the whole of his teaching, only a small part, but it is perhaps the one that most challenges our culture these days, so I cannot avoid it for your comfort.

²⁵ See the important research of David Instone-Brewer, “What God Has Joined,” *Christianity Today*, Oct. 2007, 26-27.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 7:15.

The Book of Common Prayer Of The Church Of England, 1662: Church Teaching On Marriage

DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony;

Community
Worship
Clear Purpose, Marriage Covenant

which is an *honourable estate*, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which *holy estate* Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men:

estate = New Status/ Title/ Role/ Obligations
Before Sins Entry, Genesis 2:18-25
Sign, Ephesians 4:32
Blessed Of Jesus, John 2:1-12
Wedding Gift To The Couple!
Hebrews 13:4

and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

Not Used For Other Purposes
- 5 Motives
+ 5 Motives
Presumes Clear Teaching
3 Related Purposes

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Genesis 1:28
Ephesians 6:4
Faith Across The Generations

Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

1 Cor. 7:1-7
Most People
Not To Corrupt The Church

Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

Teamwork! Genesis 2:18
Mutuality! Ephesians 5:21-33
All Of Life! Helpers To One Another
Change Of Status: Single To Married

Into which *holy estate* these two persons present come now to be joined.

Holy Status/Institution
New Titles: Husband & Wife

Therefore if any man can shew any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

Are There Any Legal, Moral Impediments?
Larger Community, Church, Law
Banns Were Then Published

The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989: Church Teaching On Marriage

Shorter, No Clear Teaching On Purposes

Friends, we are gathered together in the sight of God to witness and bless the joining together of (Name) and (Name) in *Christian* marriage. The covenant of marriage was established by God, who created us male and female for each other.

Not Generic
Genesis 2:18-25

With his presence and power
Jesus graced a wedding at Cana of Galilee,
and in his sacrificial love

John 2:1-12
Ephesians 5:21-33

(Name) and (Name) come to give themselves to one another in this holy covenant.

Mutual Gift Of The Self
More Than A Legal Contract, A Holy Covenant