



Matthew: The King and His Kingdoms

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 12: Pursuing Sexual Purity

Matthew 5:27-30

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

Introduction

Continually during His earthly ministry, Jesus emphasized that when it comes to righteousness there is a connection between the heart and the hands. True righteousness is not just a matter of the right actions, but of the right actions proceeding from a right heart. Our outward conduct must proceed from hearts that are submitted to the Word of God. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes this point more than once. He is using the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees as the context in which to explain to His disciples that religion is not enough. The scribes and Pharisees were as religious as it gets. But their righteousness was not enough. Instead Jesus said to them: “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20, ESV) They needed a righteousness that exceeded the Pharisees not in degree but in kind. They needed the righteousness of Christ that comes by faith in His death on the cross and resurrection for the salvation of sinners. True righteousness, Jesus says, flows from a saved heart and soul, from a man or a woman made new by the power of God and the cleansing blood of Christ – a righteousness born of gratitude and love. It goes beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of the law.

Last week we saw Jesus correct the Pharisees inadequate understanding of the sixth commandment forbidding murder and this week we look the proper understanding of the seventh commandment. Jesus means for us to see the:

1) The Priority of Purity (v. 27-28)

The Distortion and Corruption of the Gift of Sexuality...These are words that were not only needed in Christ's time but are perhaps even more applicable today. A good look at our society reveals the fact that man has taken the beautiful gift of sexual union between a man and his wife, the sexual intimacy of a husband and wife and has distorted and corrupted it into a vehicle to satisfy the basest instincts and lusts of his soul. Consider the condition of our society and what society has done with the gift of sexual love. We live in a culture that caters to sexual lust and fantasy. Advertisements are deliberately sexual in nature. Bookstores are filled with books and magazines that magnify the perverted and vulgar. The vast majority of secular music deals with sex, physical desire, and infidelity. From television to magazines and the entertainment industry, we are constantly bombarded with sexual messages and innuendoes. In our society sex is used to sell everything from perfume to high performance vehicles to hamburgers at Hardee's. Magazines like Men's Health, Cosmo and a host of others have reduced sexual intimacy to a merely physical act, a sport for which you need a specific skill set in order to participate. It is disgusting and pathetic, but it is enticing to many.

Our society is so preoccupied with sex that it is nearly beyond belief. It seems normal because we are immersed in the middle of it, but consider the words of CS Lewis when he says, "You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act--that is, to watch a girl undress on a stage. And if that doesn't indicate how warped our view of sex and womanhood is, imagine if you went to a country where you could fill a theater by bringing in a covered plate on the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a piece of bacon. Wouldn't you think that something had gone wrong with their appetite for food?" But that is our culture a culture. We don't have to have women or men on stages and table tops, we can access them in private on our laptops and no one is the wiser. These words from Jesus are piercing words indeed for the world, but especially so for the church. So it is into this atmosphere that Jesus speaks these words: You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

What is adultery...What is adultery and what is Jesus speaking of here? As He did last week, Jesus is springboarding off one of the ten commandments. He is using the seventh commandment which simply said: "You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14, ESV) This commandment seems pretty cut and dried, right? It would be hard to mess his one up. Adultery means "unlawful or unrighteous sexual activity with the spouse of someone else." But most Bible scholars understand this to be not only a command not to engage in sexual activity

with somebody else's spouse but also as a general command against any type of sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage.

Now no serious teacher of the Law, none of the religious leaders of Jesus' time would have thought to outwardly propose that adultery was acceptable among the people of God, but instead what they did was redefine adultery or reduce the scope of this commandment. There were some religious leaders, some Pharisees in fact, who redefined adultery to allow them to act in sexually immoral ways. They said that men could be involved in sexual activity as long as it did not involve a woman that was married to another Israelite. That would have trampled on the other man's rights, so they drew the line at that point. Sexual relations with female slaves or with Gentile women were acceptable practices. On the contrary, Israelite women were expected to be sexually pure before and after marriage.

The majority, though, were just guilty of the typical reductionism of the Pharisees. Their concern was the letter of the law and not the Spirit. As a result when it came to sexual purity, the view of the vast majority of Pharisees was pretty much this: As long as you do not have sex with someone who is not your spouse, you can be considered sexually pure. It had nothing to do with the heart, nothing to do with the desires of your heart. But Jesus' concern was always the heart, always the mind; it was the inside of the man or the woman that mattered, right? Jesus removes this commandment from the realm of the physical and applies it to our hearts. No doubt, it is a grievous sin to physically commit adultery; the Old Testament said that those caught in the act were to be stoned to death. But Jesus says that it is deeper than that. Jesus point is that the majority of the Pharisees – not the first group that was just off its rocker – the Pharisees did not go far enough in explaining what the Commandment means; they did not go far enough in fully exploring what issues God intended that Commandment to cover. And what He has to say to His disciples is going to take their understanding of that Commandment beyond anything they were presently thinking. Jesus is going to speak about what is in their hearts, not just what they do with their bodies.

Read his words with me again and we will take this phrase apart so that we can understand it. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. The word looks is translated from the Greek participle *blepon*, which conveys the idea of a continuing process of looking. It isn't the inadvertent, accidental glance...that's not what our Lord is talking about. He is talking about an intense, continuing gaze. The word that is translated as "lustful" is the Greek word, *epithumeo* which means "to

desire something or to long for something.” It is obvious from the context that what Jesus is talking about is a desire for a woman that God has placed “off limits.” It is an illegitimate desire.

Now listen, this is not a prohibition or condemnation of the normal attraction between men and women, but of deep-seated lust, of illegitimate sexual desire of man or a woman which reduces someone made in the image of God to an object to be used for personal gratification and sexual stimulation, a desire that mentally defiles and uses someone for fleshly pleasure. It is a prohibition of improper desire for someone not your husband or wife.

Notice what Jesus says. Everyone who intently looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery. Jesus doesn't say that the one who lusts after a woman commits adultery at that point or even that it is the sight of a woman that causes a man to sin, although that can be the gateway of temptation. Rather, He says that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart, because it is the heart that results in the look. The sin has already happened in the heart. There is a desire already present in the heart. The heart is the issue. In Matthew 15 Jesus made a powerful statement: (Matthew 15:19, ESV)

The point is obvious – merely the physical act of adultery is a far too narrow definition of sexual sin and sexual immorality. In a single sentence, Jesus elevates our entire concept of sexual purity beyond the level of the mere physical to a matter of the soul and heart. The man who looks upon a woman for the purpose of lusting for her has already committed adultery in his heart. The heart is the problem because when a man purposefully looks on a woman to lust after her, to desire her, he gives evidence of an adulterous heart.

Now listen, here's the thing. While Jesus is speaking of men here, surely women are in view here as well. It is faulty logic and complete foolishness to think that women are not guilty of lust and of sexually immoral thoughts and actions. This command for purity is as much about emotional entanglement with someone not your spouse, lingering embraces and unrighteous thoughts. It is as much about desiring to be desired. AW Pink said in relation to this text: "...if lustful looking be so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after--as Jezebel, who painted her face, adorned her head, and looked out of the window (2 Kgs. 9:30)--are not less, but even more guilty. In this matter it is

only too often the case that men sin, but women tempt them so to do. How great, then, must be the guilt of the great majority of the modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses." This is a heart issue for men and women and a dangerous one at that.

The dangers of lust...Sexual lust, improper sexual desire is a dangerous, dangerous sin. It is dangerous sin because it hardens our hearts to the gospel. Lust enwraps our souls and bonds our hearts to what is wrong and will harden our hearts to the gospel, harden our hearts to the grace of God for sinners. Left unchallenged, it consumes our thoughts and deadens us to Christ's Word. Improper desire toward someone who is not your spouse charges God with wickedness in holding back what is best for you. To see another person and to desire that person is to complain against God's sovereignty. Moreover, lust is destructive because it trains our hearts to desire something other than Christ as our satisfaction and it reduces people to objects, to a piece of meat and completely discounts and despises the image of God in a human being. You can even do this with your own spouse.

Where this is particularly true of the sin of viewing pornography. No real woman can live up to the standard of the airbrush. No woman can ever compete with pornography -- or actresses or pop singers for that matter. They're whole job is to look good. But neither can any real man live up to the standards of romantic comedies, country singers or the guys in romantic novels. Matthew McConaughey and Ryan Reynolds are not real guys. They are just dudes that get paid to read lines. I know that's humorous, but this is no laughing matter. (Hebrews 13:4, ESV)

Lust brings reproach on the name of God and the gospel of Christ if you claim to be a Christian. Sexual sin robs you of moral character and strength because we are weighed down with guilt, and therefore we are not quick to stand firm when God's Word and His commands are being defied in our homes, our churches, and in the world. It robs us of moral fiber and backbone, because we're we know ourselves to be hypocrites. Not only that, sexual sin left unchecked in our lives leads to greater and greater degrees of lust and perversion and thoroughly defiles us as the temple of God. That is why Paul writes (1Co 6:18-20)

When we consider these words of Jesus, we begin to see how much bigger the scope of these words really is. It is one thing for us to be able to say that we have never committed the physical act of adultery or sexual immorality, but it is another thing altogether to say that we have never violated our marriage by flirting with someone else; never sinned by engaging in fantasies concerning life with another person, never secretly lusted for someone, or viewed pornography or magazine ads or whatever... There is probably no-one that has reached puberty that is innocent of this sin. This is a prevalent sin, especially in this culture and that is why Jesus calls us to

2) Ruthlessness for Righteousness' Sake (v.29-30)

Do these sound like shocking words? They should because they are. Jesus is using deliberately repugnant and grotesque imagery to show how repugnant and grotesque sin is in the sight of God. We cannot pamper it, flirt with it, manage it, or play around the edges. We must hate sin, despise sin, root it out of our lives and hearts. Paul counsels us: (Colossians 3:5–6, ESV)

Why does Jesus talk about tearing out the right eye or cutting off the right arm? Because the right eye and the right arm were thought to be the best eye and the best arm and so Jesus is simply saying that there is nothing too precious to eliminate from your life if it is going to cause your heart to be inflamed in lust. Get rid of everything and anything that leads you down the path of sin. Be radical and be ruthless. Do not play with sin. Cut off whatever it is that inflames you - if it is TV, get rid of it; if it is the internet, cut it off; if it is magazines, stop the subscription; if it is the newspaper, cancel the subscription. If it is a place you go, your gym membership for instance, if it something that you do, cut it off. Whatever causes you to sin, whatever seduces you toward sin; you have to cut it completely out of your life. To obey this command of Jesus will involve for us a selective maiming. We will have to eliminate from the things in our lives, good and bad, that lead us into temptation. This is not an issue of legalism, but of wisdom and of the practical pursuit of righteousness and defense of your soul. It doesn't mean that you have to mandate the same for everyone else, but for you, for your sake, whatever is the source of temptation, cut it off. That bothers some. "Come on brother, let's not be radical, need to be balanced." How bad do you want to get rid of sin in your life?

Do you want to put to death the lusts in your heart? Then stop entertaining them. Make no provision for the flesh. In Rom 13:14 Paul writes, (Rom 13:14) In other words, abide in Christ and in His Word, cry out to the Lord for deliverance and mercy and grace to help in time of need and by faith simply refuse to accommodate fleshly lusts. Refuse to furnish your mind with the means to entertain evil thoughts. Make no preparations for the possibility of sin. Pray with the Psalmist in Psalm 139, (Psa 139:23-24) And then as God reveals our sin, we attack it with the word, confess it, call it what it is, and repent of it. Preach the gospel to yourself – Christ died for this sin, to kill this sin, to remove the shame and debt of this sin, to give power over this sin. Kill your sin. That is what we must do.

We need to see where lust, if we do not fight against it, will take us. Certainly there are temporal losses for a man or a woman who does not fight against lust but continually gives into its power – marital strife, loss of reputation and trust, loss of respect. But that is not what Jesus emphasizes here. He says: For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. These are not idle words, not some idle threat. This is a very real warning. Don't get me wrong beloved, it is true that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone, and that all those who are justified will be glorified. Nevertheless, those who give themselves over to impurity will be lost. Justifying faith is a purifying faith, so those who do not persevere in the fight and strive by the empowering of God's grace for holiness, according to the writer of Hebrews, will not see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Those who forsake the fight against lust will perish. The evidence of justification is that we do not forsake the fight. (1 Thessalonians 4:3–7, ESV)

It is the pursuit of purity in the age of sensuality that defines a faithful follower of Christ. So let's close this morning with some:

3) Principles for Purity in an Age of Sensuality

Embrace God's Grace

Pursue A Deepening Love For Christ

Be Honest About the Condition of Your Heart

Pursue Biblical Instruction and Walk According to the Spirit

Unmask the Deception of Sexual Sin and Its Aftermath

Consider the Reality of God's Omniscience

Remember the Price Required to Deliver Us From Sin

Persevere – When You Stumble, Rise and Walk

Consider Your Soul and Discipline it For Godliness

Restore the Glory of Christian Marriage and Intimacy

Last, one of the chief ways to combat the powerful effects of illicit sex and lust is to magnify the place of marriage and sexual intimacy in marriage to its proper place. Marriage is meant to be a picture of the love of Christ for His church and vice versa and sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is a picture of the communion of Christ with His bride. Marriage is the union of the body, soul and spirit and sexual intimacy is to be the expression and celebration of that oneness. It is like worship, not that you worship your spouse, or that you worship the act, but it is the expression of oneness, the folding of your lives together. God blesses the sexual union in the marital faithfulness of a husband and wife. It is encouraged and is a beautiful thing. Proverbs 5:15-19 says: (Proverbs 5:15–19, ESV) We see it throughout Scripture. The Song of Solomon especially declares the beauty and wonder of wedded sexual intimacy. To tamper with the design, to attempt to find satisfaction outside of marriage can never be blessed by God and in fact brings his judgment.

Puritan pastor Thomas Hooker described the kind of love that ought to characterize the marriage relationship and will protect marriage from infidelity: “The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves ... dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye and apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at the table, walks with her when he travels... She lies in his bosom, and his heart trusts in her, which forceth all to confess that the stream of his affection, like a mighty current, runs with full tide and strength (only to her).” If we are to battle the powerful allure of illicit sex, of lust, then we must restore the glory of marriage and sexual intimacy in marriage. Then the hooks of lust will lose their barbs.

Beloved, I know that as we look at this text this morning, there are a variety of thoughts and issues going on in this room – the answer for them all is the gospel. Though our sin is great, the call of the gospel, the grace of God in Christ can banish and destroy even the greatest despair and guilt and shame.

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