

Heart of the Matter

Matthew 5:27-30

Intro

As we get back into our verse by verse study of the Gospel of Matthew this morning, we come to the Lord Jesus' famous teaching on adultery in the heart in...

Matthew 5:27-30 (NKJV)

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Now, I believe that the Lord Jesus is pointing out the fact that this sin of lustfulness is ultimately an *heart* problem...

- And it may sound cheesy but ***the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart...***

This is essential — so much of the failure that we see among ourselves and other Christians is the result of failing to deal with the heart...

Much of professing Christianity has devolved into following the “*gospel of behavior modification*”...

- In other words, the focus is on **doing** certain things as opposed to **being** a certain kind of person...

This merely outward focus is called **externalism** — and it is attractive to our fallen nature because it leaves the heart unchanged...

- But this is not what the Lord God wants from us — He does not want us to be hypocrites who draw near to Him with our lips but who keep our hearts far from Him...

He wants our **heart** — He wants to change us from the inside out — He wants to transform our **being** — and then our **doing** will follow...

So, with this in mind, we are going to take a different route this morning...

Instead of simply working through our passage in Matthew, I want to explore what is really happening when we commit sin...

- Instead of simply dealing with externals — let’s examine what is really going on...

Let’s seek to understand why we do not have victory over sin — why we keep on struggling with the same old things instead of walking in newness of life...

So, let's begin by turning to Exodus 20...

[give context — Moses receiving the Law while on Mt. Sinai...]

Exodus 20:1-17 (NKJV)

1 And God spoke all these words, saying:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

"I am Yahweh, your God — and I brought you out of the slavery of Egypt"...

This is something that the Lord reminds the Israelites of over and over again throughout the Old Testament...

Because this was to be their ***identity*** — they were the people of God — people who had been created by God — people who had gone into bondage — and who had been freed by the Lord...

And this is very important for us to come to grips with — because this is foreshadowed our own story...

We were created by God but we too were in bondage — we were slaves...

- *We were enslaved by our sinful desires...*

And acting on those sinful desires led to the enslaving consequences of our sinful actions...

We were further enslaved by the **deceptions** of the devil and by the **fear of death** that he promotes...

- The fallen world system, the devil and his demons and our own fallen nature conspired to keep us in a state of slavery...

But just as God set the Israelites free from bondage to the Egyptians, so God has set Christians free through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ...

- The freedom from Egypt was a foreshadowing of the freedom that is available to those who turn to Christ and are born again...

Now, as we think about the Israelites who were freed from Egypt, we understand that they needed new **leadership**...

- They were no longer slaves — they were no longer under the governance of Egyptian slave-masters — God was to be their ruler...

But unlike the harsh governance of the Egyptians, the Lord God wanted what was **best** for the Israelites...

- So He gave them ten commandments which — if obeyed from a **heart of love** — lead to a **life of abundance**...

So, let's remind ourselves of these commandments...

1st Commandment

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

There are to be no other gods in the true God's presence...

- [expand — God is omnipresent — should be no other gods anywhere...]

Now, the scriptures make it clear that the God of the Bible is the only true God — all other “gods” are either simply imaginary or represent demonic entities...

So, the first commandment sets the course....

The true and living God is the only One who is to be worshiped — He is the only God — no false god is to be worshiped and served — ***even if that false god is ourselves...***

And we must address this issue here...

Because whenever we sin — whenever we choose to disobey God in some way — we are ultimately ***worshipping ourselves as god...***

- When I sin, I am essentially ***making an offering to myself*** — I am saying that I am god — and if I must take this thing or do this thing — whatever it is — ***for myself...***

And this is the ***heart of the matter*** — the heart of all sin — instead of committing to ***self-sacrifice*** — I commit to ***self-indulgence...***

- Self-indulgence is the proclamation that ***I am god now*** — and offerings must be made to me...

I must satisfy my desires or I will be a displeased god — and my unrighteous wrath will fall on those around me...

- Admittedly, this is a very ugly picture — this is an unflattering portrait of who we become when we commit to sin...

But it is what we need — because we have been lied to — and we have lied to ourselves — for far too long...

- Sin in our lives and in the lives of others has been *romanticized* and *glorified*...

We have been taught that getting what we want is the most important thing in the world...

- We have been taught that we are gods that must be satisfied — but this is simply not true...

And the wonderful reality is that we can step off of the papier-mâché thrones of our own making and worship before the true throne — the throne of the living God...

- And when this life is over — when we go home to be with the Lord — the Lord will invite us to sit on His throne with Him...

Revelation 3:21 (NKJV)

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

What a wonderful future we have to look forward to!...

2nd Commandment

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

This commandment prohibits the creating of images to worship...

- God is invisible and immaterial and He is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth...

To create a physical object to worship is to commit idolatry — it is to misdirect worship...

- To worship anything physical — whether we create it or someone else creates it — is idolatry — and it inevitably draws our hearts away from the true and living God...

3rd Commandment

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

God's name is to be honored — because God's name encapsulates ***all that He is*** and ***all that He does...***

To honor God's name is to honor ***the character of God*** — it is to trust that He is completely and unchangeably good — and that obeying Him is the wisest thing that anyone can do...

4th Commandment

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The Israelites were to rest from labor and focus on the Lord on the Sabbath...

- Now, in the NT we are told that the Lord Jesus Himself is our Sabbath — He is our rest...

So that even as we ***work*** we are to ***rest in Him*** — we are not to strive because we are complete in Him...

We can rest as we work because we are ***not working to be accepted by Him*** — we are working because ***we have already been accepted by Him...***

- Our ***doing*** will flow from our ***being***...

5th Commandment

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

The honoring of father and mother is fundamental to a well-functioning society because the family unit is the building block of society...

- And learning to honor one's father and mother is the first step to learning to ***honor God***...

[expand — father and mother are the first authorities — we learn to submit to their authority so that we might ultimately submit to God's authority...]

6th Commandment

13 "You shall not murder.

Do not unrighteously kill one who is made in the image of God...

7th Commandment

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Do not have any sexual encounters outside of a one-man, one-woman marriage...

8th Commandment

15 "You shall not steal.

Do not take things that do not belong to you...

9th Commandment

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Do not lie...

10th Commandment

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

Do not covet — be content with the things that you have...

- Now, these are the ten commandments — but as we study the Old Testament we see that God gave many more commandments than these ten...

And during the time of the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, there was argumentation over which commandment was the most important...

- ***Which one should be focused on the most? Which one was the most important?...***

To see what the Lord Jesus had to say on the subject, please turn to...

Matthew 22:34-40 (NKJV) *[final week of the Lord's earthly min.]*

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

[expand on setting — what is the most important thing to focus on — *what is the heart of the matter?...*]

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and great commandment.

[expand — a summation of the first 5 commandments...]

39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

[expand — a summation of commandments 6-10...]

40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

These two commandments — ***Loving God*** and ***Loving Others*** — are *the central teachings of the entirety of the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament)...*

- And since the Lord Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets — we would be wise to view ***Loving God*** and ***Loving Others*** — in that order — ***as the heart of the matter...***

*Now, according to Dallas Willard, **love is a genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of others...***

So, if you and I — as born again believers — make it our single-minded focus to Love God and Love Others...

If our focus is to cultivate a genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of God and of others — then we will be people who automatically obey all the other commandments...

The problem that we find in our own lives and in the lives of others is that this heart of the matter is not the focus...

Instead, externalism — behavior modification — becomes the focus...

And externalism approaches the commandments of God as something that is merely outward...

- As something that only governs our bodily behavior but has nothing to say about the heart...

*But it is the **heart** that is the source of all the evil that we find in ourselves and in others....*

Matthew 15:18-19 (NKJV)

18 “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

So, what the Lord Jesus is teaching in Matthew 5 on the subject of lust is not out of line with the rest of His teaching...

- *God has always been interested in the heart — He has never been interested in mere outward conformity...*

Isaiah 29:13 (NKJV)

**“...these people draw near with their mouths
And honor Me with their lips,
But have removed their hearts far from Me...”**

Now, turn if you would to...

Matthew 23:25-28 (NKJV)

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

With all of this in mind, please turn to Matthew 5 as the Lord Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount...

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Here the Lord Jesus reminds His listeners of the 7th Commandment and He is addressing the externalism issue...

- It seems that the Pharisees were teaching that adultery was only committed if the physical act took place...

But the Lord Jesus will correct this false view as we move into vs 28...

28 But I say to you

Please notice that the Lord Jesus is doing two things here...

1) The Lord Jesus is putting His teaching on the same level as the commandments of God that were received on Sinai...

And this is the sort of thing that He does all throughout the gospels...

2) The Lord Jesus is proclaiming Himself to the authoritative interpreter of the Commandments of God...

Now, these are incredibly important truths to take to heart if we are to be people who practice **heart obedience**...

- We must take to heart the reality that **whatever the Lord Jesus says is to be obeyed — no matter what...**

Because what He says is true and what He commands is always what is best for us...

If we choose to believe these truths then our behaviors will change — but they will change **from the inside out**...

Continuing on in vs 28...

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

looks — *to take in the sight of something, look at, observe; constant fixation of the eyes upon...*

This is not an accidental glance but a purposeful staring...

“You can’t keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from nesting in your hair”...

What we see in verse 28 is a ***choice*** — a choice to indulge in lusting looks that lead to adultery of the heart...

- [ex. a choice to not love the other person — a choice to not to seek their good — (compare to Dracula)...]

Now, it is important to understand here in vs 28 that the Lord Jesus is not saying that the physical act of adultery and adultery in the heart are the same thing...

David Guzik

“More than a few people have been deceived on this point and say, ‘I’ve already committed adultery in my heart, so I may as well do it in practice.’ The act of adultery is far worse than adultery in the heart. Jesus’ point is not to say they are the same things, but to say they are both sin, and both prohibited by the command against adultery.”

Now, for those who have made a habit of looking to lust — a habit that is greatly encouraged by our culture — the heart must be addressed...

- This habit of looking to lust has been formed over time that habit must be addressed at *the heart level* and new habits must be formed...

“It takes a passion to conquer a passion”...

[expand — reading **Renovation of the Heart** and following the plan for character formation...]

VIM — Vision / Intention / Means...

Let's move on now to vs 29-30...

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

As I've said before when covering these verses, I do not believe that the Lord Jesus is advocating physical mutilation of the body because that would not change the heart...

- A person could continue to lust without eyes or without hands...

So what is the Lord Jesus talking about?

The **right eye** represents your best vision and your **right hand** represents your best skill...

- The big idea is that we should be willing to give up anything and everything that causes us to sin — no matter what...

“The loss of any body part is preferable to the loss of the whole person, that is the point”...(Thomas Constable)

The Lord Jesus presents us with a strong exhortation to do whatever it takes to get rid of the sin in our life — to be merciless with our sin and to make no provision for the flesh...

Conclusion

With that said, we will stop here for today and Lord-willing pick up in vs 31 next week...

And as we close, I will simply remind you that ***Loving God*** and ***Loving Others*** is the heart of the matter...

- All sin — of whatever variety — whether it be lust or anger or deception — or anything else — it all results from a ***failure to Love God and Love Others...***

Now, I don't know that love is ***all we need*** — but I do know that love is the ***first thing that we need...***

- And the gospel — the good news — tells us that we have the first thing that we need because *the Lord God does loves us* — and that He has proven that love by giving His Son to die for us...

And as believers we have access to that great love — we can love others with the same love with which God has loved us...

- ***As we cultivate that love — that genuine inner readiness and longing to secure the good of God and of others, we will see that love is the answer — love is the heart of the matter...***