

The Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 5: Purity in a Sensual Age -- Matthew 5:27-30

We live in a world that sells desire on every screen. A person can be standing in line at the grocery store, phone in hand, and be only a thumb-swipe away from images that would have been unthinkable in public a generation ago. Temptation no longer has to find us; it arrives uninvited, pings in our pockets, waits in the margins of every webpage. If ever there was a generation that needed Jesus' words on purity, it is ours. And his words are as bracing today as they were on that hillside.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,'" Jesus begins, and once again the comfortable among us settle back. We have kept that one too. But then comes the turn we have learned to expect from him: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Once again Jesus refuses to let righteousness stop at the skin. He follows the act of adultery upstream to the lingering look, the cultivated fantasy, the desire we feed in private and assume no one sees.

Then he says something so severe it makes us flinch. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Better to lose a part of yourself than for your whole self to be thrown into hell. He is not commanding self-mutilation, for a blind man can still lust. He is using shocking language to wake us up to the seriousness of the matter and the radical, costly action that purity sometimes requires. Sin in this area is not to be coddled or negotiated with; it is to be cut off.

This is hard ground, and many who read it carry wounds and regrets. So hear the heart behind the severity before you go further. Jesus is not a scold who despises us for being tempted. He is a Savior who knows exactly how this sin promises life and delivers death, and he loves us too much to let us wander into its trap. The purity he calls us to is not joyless repression; it is the freedom of a heart that no longer belongs to its appetites. Before you read another line, let his words land with both their weight and their kindness. He means to set you free.

Group Discussion: Jesus traces adultery back to the lustful look and then uses shocking language about cutting off whatever causes us to sin. Why do you think our culture treats lust as harmless while Jesus treats it as deadly serious, and what does his urgency tell us about how much is really at stake?

Personal Reflection: This is a tender area, so answer it just between you and God. Where has the steady pressure of a sensual culture shaped your eyes, your imagination, or your private habits more than you would like to admit, and what would it mean to invite Christ into that exact place?

Read Matthew 5:27-30

Study Questions

1. Jesus says that lustful intent is already a form of adultery “in the heart” (v. 28). What does this teach about the difference between temptation and the cultivated desire Jesus condemns, and why does God hold us accountable for the life of our imagination?
2. Be honest with yourself about your own eyes and imagination. Where have you been telling yourself that a “harmless” look or fantasy costs nothing, and how does Jesus’ teaching challenge that story?
3. Jesus uses deliberately shocking images, tearing out an eye, cutting off a hand (v. 29–30). Since a blind person can still lust, what is Jesus really calling for, and what does the severity of his language reveal about the seriousness of sexual sin?
4. Think about the specific “eyes” and “hands” in your life, the apps, accounts, screens, or relationships that repeatedly become doorways to temptation. What would radical, decisive action look like for you, and what have you been unwilling to cut off?
5. Jesus warns that it is better to lose a part of the body than for the “whole body to be thrown into hell” (v. 29–30). Why does Jesus connect unchecked sexual sin to such serious eternal consequences, and how does this guard us against treating it as a minor matter?

6. Where have you been treating sexual purity as an area where God grades on a curve, assuming a little compromise is no real danger? What would change if you took Jesus' warning here at face value?
7. Jesus speaks of the eye and the hand "causing" us to sin, locating the problem not in the body itself but in the heart that uses them (v. 29-30). How does true purity go deeper than merely avoiding certain acts, and what does it mean to be pure in heart and not just in behavior?
8. Think about whether your strategy for purity has been mostly about managing behavior or about tending your heart. What is one way you could pursue a pure heart this week, and not just an unstained record?
9. Sexual sin is the area where many believers feel the deepest shame and the greatest sense of being beyond help. How does the gospel speak to both the seriousness of this sin and the hope of cleansing and transformation, so that the call to purity is neither a hopeless burden nor a license to keep sinning? Ground your answer in what Christ has done for sinners.
10. Look back over the whole passage. Jesus has reached into the most private region of your life with both severity and love. Where is he calling you to decisive action, and what is one specific, concrete step you will take this week to pursue purity of heart?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, fleeing sexual immorality because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit; Job 31:1, making a covenant with one's eyes; Psalm 51:1–10, David's plea for a clean heart after his fall; 2 Timothy 2:22, fleeing youthful passions and pursuing righteousness with those who call on the Lord; 1 John 1:7–9, the cleansing blood of Jesus and the faithfulness of God to forgive.