

Authentic Christians

Lesson 9 – Matthew 5:27-30

1. Christ is answering the question “Who is guilty of _____?” which had been conveniently explained away by the male spiritual leadership of Israel.

2. The Essence of Adultery

- This is the 2nd illustration of a “righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees” (5:20).
- Again the formula “You have heard ... but I say to you” ... correction of the misinterpretations preached by the religious leaders.

Notice that the Law is quoted in 5:21 and 5:27, but not in vv. 31, 33, 38, or 43 ... more evidence that Jesus is going after Pharisaical perversions of the Law.

- Christ quotes the 7th Command (Ex. 20:14) which was essentially quoted to Him by the Pharisees in Jn. 8:1-6 (See also Lev. 20:10 & Deut. 22:22-30).
 - The breaking of a marriage covenant (adultery) is very, very serious in God’s Word – the same judgments that accompany murder are the same judgments that are implied in vv. 27-30!
 - Very few people commit murder, but the act of adultery was and **IS** very prevalent even though both sins have the same biblical penalty – death.
 - The Pharisees may not have been guilty of the act of adultery (thus avoiding the death penalty), but they were guilty of “mental adultery” or a lustful heart.

What is the significance of Jesus stooping and writing on the ground after being addressed by the religious leaders? (Speculation: Giving Holy Spirit time to convict, see Psalm 50:16-21)

This text and others seem to be so male-oriented ... why? Are women incapable of committing adultery (lust) or not culpable before God for their actions/thoughts? (Gen. 39:6-7 tells of Potiphar’s wife, men are more susceptible because of God’s creation, unfortunately society tolerates men’s adultery more than women)

- “Lust” is the Greek word **epithumeō** and it means “to desire passionately or to intensely long for something” (Mt. 13:17, Lk. 16:21, 1 Cor. 10:6, Gal. 5:17, James 4:2)
 - The verb (“to intensely long for”) flavors the noun (*epithumia* - “an intense desire”) – the noun (the passion) becomes “moral” or “immoral” based on the object desired or the manner in which the desire is fulfilled.
 - The lust spoken of here is not just an appreciation for beauty (Gen. 12:11, 29:17; Esth. 2:7; Song of Solomon 4:1), but an immoral desire to enjoy that beauty outside the boundaries God has placed on the person’s passion (“lust for her” – [CEV] *and want her*, [NIV] *looks at a woman lust-*

fully, [NCV] and wants to sin sexually with her, [ESV] lustful intent)

“This is not a prohibition of the normal attraction which exists between men and women, but of the deep-seated lust which consumes and devours, which in imagination attacks and rapes, which mentally contemplates and commits adultery.” (Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, pg. 46)

- Lust (**epithumeō**) is universal in the human heart (we all have things we long for or intensely desire) – like anger, it’s a common craving shaped by our grace-deprived thoughts and will, and it flavors our inter-personal relationships.
- Improper and unbiblical passion (lust) is the basic building block of sin (Jms. 1:13-15)!

Does improper and unbiblical passion (lust) explain all sinful acts? Does culture, genetics, personal history, etc. play a role in sinful acts? Can sin ever be excused and/or approved because of external influences or internal physiology?

- EXAMPLE: Lust for tangible assets that are not yours is called **coveting** (Rom. 7:7) and a lust for power that is not yours to claim is called **pride** (1 Jn. 2:16) ... lust manifests itself sinfully in various forms just as anger does.

“The real trouble with the Pharisees and the scribes was that they had never even read the Ten Commandments properly. If they had truly considered and studied them, they would have seen that you cannot take each one in isolation. For example, the tenth says that we must never covet our neighbor’s wife, and that, obviously, should be taken in conjunction with this command not to commit adultery.” (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 204)

“The first thing our Lord emphasizes is what we may call “the depth or the power of sin” ... In other words the teaching here is the characteristic teaching of the Bible everywhere about this subject, namely, that what we must really concentrate upon is not so much sins as sin. Sins are nothing but the symptoms of a disease called sin and it is not the symptoms that matter but the disease, for it is the disease that kills and not the symptoms.” (Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, pg. 209)

- Jesus, then, is defining what constitutes or motivates adultery – a passion for (or emotional attraction to) that person whom God has forbidden to you and withheld from you!
- Just like anger should serve notice for inter-personal reconciliation (vv. 23-26), lust should lead us to reconciliation with God - the mortification of sin that dwells in our heart (vv. 29-30).
- Jesus picks up the theme of adultery and uses two figures of speech to convey the radical response we should have to a similar lust dwelling in our heart (both looking and handling are ma-

- for components of sexual immorality).
- Origen took these verses literally and was castrated – an insufficient and painful application, for sure, but one in keeping with the spirit of Jesus’ words!
 - We know these verses are meant to be bold and shocking statements because issues of the heart can never be resolved through the mutilation of the body (blind people and amputees can be just as lustful as those who have two eyes and two hands).
 - HOWEVER ... there is no reason NOT to take Jesus’ commands literally since the judgment is real (hell); the immediate context gives no reason to think that Jesus is being symbolic or hypothetical!
 - The threat of “Gehenna” is meant to emphasize the seriousness of lust by connecting it with the judgments due those who continually give in to it.