

## “Guarding our Hearts”

*Matthew 5:27-32*

In Matt. 5:22-48 Jesus uses the some very familiar Old Testament commands that the Pharisees had reinterpreted or misapplied to the people of Jesus' day. In the first two Jesus tackles a couple of the 10 commandments, thou shalt not murder and thou shalt not commit adultery – which not surprisingly are the two main commandments that people use in general to prove their self-righteousness. Ask almost anyone if they think they are a good person and they usually start off saying something like 'Yeah I'm pretty good. I haven't killed anyone and I haven't committed adultery.'

We actually see an example of this in the New Testament when the rich young ruler approaches Jesus and asks 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus responds with the typical answer that any Rabbi would have said to see where his heart is.

*<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"* <sup>20</sup> "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Many thought – and the religious leaders taught - that if I keep the externals I've obeyed God. But last week Jesus showed us that 'don't murder' also included don't assassinate the character of another image bearer of God by devaluing them with critical and harsh words. And where do our words begin? In the heart. So, Jesus tells us that righteousness - obedience to God's Word - is a heart issue, not a hands only issue. Obedience starts internally and shows itself externally through our actions and words.

Now Jesus goes a little deeper with the next example.

*<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"* <sup>28</sup> *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Here Jesus moves from hurtful words to harmful, unhealthy thoughts. Just as not committing literal murder didn't mean you've never broken the command 'Do not murder', so also Jesus says 'Just because you think self-righteously that since you've never committed the act of adultery doesn't mean you didn't break the command 'Do not commit adultery. In the same way that bitter thoughts of anger can lead to character assassinating words which can possibly lead to murder, so does intentional thinking about or looking at people for the purpose of self-satisfaction could possibly lead to adultery.

What then are some ways we can reduce the temptation towards looking at people who are not our spouses for self-satisfying reasons? Since Jesus equates unhealthy lustful thinking and viewing as being the baby steps towards adultery, we need to . . .

### **Be on Guard for Unhealthy Desires** **(5:27-28)**

The religious leaders of Jesus' day, instead of dealing with the issue of their hearts, made up rules about why they can divorce so that the in their eyes they weren't committing adultery since they

were 'legally' divorced. Jesus will deal with this specifically in vv. 31-32. But this is what He was challenging here; this lack of commitment to their spouses. So remaining committed physically and mentally to our spouses – or protecting ourselves physically and mentally for our future spouse (even if you have no clue who that might be) – is key to guarding against unhealthy desires.

The key word here is not look but the word “lustfully”. We have eyes. We see people everywhere we go. It is not difficult with only a glance to notice people who are attractive. God created us in His image so beauty and handsome are things we notice. Jesus isn't saying stop looking at people but stop looking at real people or images of people (on a screen, photo or even animated). The preposition “with” is a preposition of purpose. You are looking at someone with the purpose for lusting after, coveting, wanting to have sexually.

This is a heart issue. Don't think about people for the wrong purposes. Guard your heart against this kind of thinking and viewing. Let's ask ourselves a couple of questions to help us be proactive against purposeful lusting for someone other than our spouse.

### ***Are we protecting our hearts? (Prov. 6:20-29)***

If this is an issue of the heart then what are we doing to protect it? In Prov. 6:20-29 Solomon warns young men to guard their hearts, here in the context against an adulterous woman. Yet we can apply it for ourselves towards any lustful thoughts.

*<sup>20</sup> My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching. <sup>21</sup> Bind them always on your heart; fasten them around your neck.*

*<sup>22</sup> When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. <sup>23</sup> For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life,*

*<sup>24</sup> keeping you from your neighbor's wife, from the smooth talk of a wayward woman.*

*<sup>25</sup> Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes.*

*<sup>26</sup> For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife preys on your very life.*

*<sup>27</sup> Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?*

*<sup>28</sup> Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?*

*<sup>29</sup> So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.*

The parents' teaching in the context of Proverbs that makes you wise and keeps you from suffering the consequences of sinful behaviour is the Word of God. Do we have passages like this committed to memory or at least know where to find it when we are tempted in this area? God's Word gives us the way to life. It corrects us and instructs us. Wear it around your neck means have it with you at all times. Which many of you do who have the Word on your phone literally do. And if you do, do you use it to go to the Word during the course of the day? If your only exposure to the Word of God is 5 minutes in the morning or a quick glance at the daily bread, that's not enough protection for the sinful, over-sexed society that we live in. It used to be you could almost avoid this completely but now it comes at us from every corner of life. We have to be prepared for the lustful temptations that will come to us unannounced and be ready to extinguish these fiery darts with the shield of faith which is grounded in God's Word.

We also have to believe that the healthy desires God gives us with our spouse (or future spouse) will satisfy us as God promises they will. Since Paul says in Eph. 5 that the husband's body belongs to his wife and the wife's body belongs to her husband then . . .

### ***Are we protecting our spouse? (Ecc. 9:9)***

. . . from lustful thinking by meeting their needs and healthy desires that there is very little temptation to think and look elsewhere? Again, Solomon discovered that true joy comes from obeying God and enjoying the pleasures He intended for us to enjoy. In Ecc. 9:9 he says,

*<sup>9</sup>Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.*

‘Meaningless’ doesn’t make this sound attractive! But the word vanity or meaningless means ‘fleeting’ like soap bubbles. Here today and gone tomorrow. Solomon discovered that God intended for marriage to be the healthy relationship for enjoyment of one another. There is very little desire to look outside of marriage for satisfaction when our marriages are healthy. And if we are looking to be married one day you have to believe by faith, that God says if you wait until marriage and enjoy His gift of intimacy with only your future spouse then that will meet your needs.

But when we are faced with temptations – and since God created us sexual beings and it is one of Satan’s more successful strategies to lure us away from following God’s Word – we have to come up with a tool to deal with that. Remember, Jesus was using exaggeration as a teaching tool. Here He tells us that if our right eye causes us to stumble to tear it out or if our right hand causes us to stumble then cut it off. Jesus didn’t mean that physically but He used it as an illustration to tell us to

. . .

## **Perform the Necessary Spiritual Surgery** **(5:29-30)**

. . .to help us remain faithful to God and our spouse. The word ‘stumble’ in Greek is the word we get scandal from. It means ‘to ensnare’. Only God knows us better than ourselves so we to help us remain faithful to God and our spouse we must ask ourselves some more questions like:

### ***What is our ‘snare’? (Rom. 6:11-14)***

Identify your snare and do spiritual surgery so that you won’t go beyond the temptation. This is what Jesus meant by removing those things that cause us to be ensnared by the temptation of lust. If TV or internet is your snare turn it off, have someone monitor your viewing or your browser history. If a location is your snare, stay away from it. Or if you can’t avoid the place what can you do to change your viewing position or the people you work with?

When we are tempted there’s many verses of Scripture that we can turn to. Here’s a few. Remember as a believer sin no longer has the power to control us. We give it power when we indulge in it; we let it take over. Paul said in Rom. 6:13,

*<sup>11</sup>In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup>Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup>Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.*

And when we are in the midst of temptation another golden nugget from Paul is 1 Cor. 10:13,

*<sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

Don't let Satan deceive you into thinking you have no power over those temptations or sin itself. We do. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We have His Word which we must hide in our hearts so we might not sin against God.

But perhaps we let ourselves go where we shouldn't. Perhaps we need to ask a different question if we fail or refuse to recognize our snares.

### ***Do I take temptations seriously? (1 Cor. 6:18)***

Perhaps we've become so insensitive to our sin we just indulge in it without thinking. We let our minds drift where, they shouldn't and our eyes go where they shouldn't and we do it without even realizing its sin. Gouge out the eye because the eye is what sees the temptation and cut off the hand because the hand is what steals what doesn't belong to you. Adultery – or mental adultery – is to covet that which does not belong to. This of course is commandment # 10 which tells us that even the commandment against adultery wasn't limited to the act alone. Here are some passages to understand if we're not taking temptation and sin seriously enough:

*1 Cor. 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;<sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*

God made us so we belong to Him. Our bodies are His therefore we are held accountable for where we take our eyes and hands and our minds to.

Job 31:1 offers us help when he talked about his own defense towards sexual temptation when he said,

*"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman. <sup>2</sup> For what is our lot from God above, our heritage from the Almighty on high? <sup>3</sup> Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? <sup>4</sup> Does he not see my ways and count my every step?"*

Job's beliefs affected his lifestyle. Since God is all-seeing and all-knowing He can see our eyes and know our thoughts. Therefore, we should vow to keep healthy thoughts and steer clear of dangerous viewing paths. Because there are consequences.

Back to the apostle Paul, we hear in Col. 3:5,

*Col. 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

That sounds pretty drastic! Paul also says take sin and temptations seriously.

And if 1 Cor. 10:31 says 'Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God' then we need to

**Glorify God in our Marriages**  
**(5:31-32)**

Jesus spoke against spiritual and mental adultery because the religious leaders created a loophole in Deut 24:1 and were allowing divorce for any reason. In Matt. 19:3-9 Jesus is asked to give His opinion on which Rabbi's interpretation of Deut 24:1 He held to. Deut. 24:1 says if,

*it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house,*

Rabbi Shammai held that "indecency" meant only sexual unfaithfulness but Rabbi Hillel taught that 'indecency' meant anything the husband claimed was indecent. Guess whose view was more popular? The Law said that adulterers were to be stoned to death but God allowed a certificate of divorce to be issued so that these people weren't all killed but He commanded them not remarry if they were adulterers.

What Jesus was speaking out against here was that many people had divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality and by marrying others were actually committing adultery because these people had divorced wrongly. The Law and Jesus and Paul (1 Cor. 7) give some concessions for acceptable divorce and the allowance for them to remarry under certain circumstances but Jesus was condemning wrongful divorces. What Jesus is always looking for in marriages that we glorify God, couples remaining faithful to each other in body and in mind. And this applies,

#### ***Before and during marriage (Heb. 13:4)***

*<sup>4</sup>Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

Even though it isn't popular these days to remain sexually pure before marriage, God never changed His standard. So, you must guard your heart before you are married as well as during your marriage. This is how we can glorify God in our marriages. "*So whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, do it all for the glory of God*" applies to keeping our bodies pure but also our minds pure which isn't easy in our world today.

One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. When we walk with the Spirit – when we live by God's standards each day -the outside evidence (fruit) of inner spiritual growth will be more self-control. This is not more effort on our part. Rather it is the natural result of abiding in Jesus. Self-control becomes more natural (because we're growing our new nature in Christ) that mental and physical sexual temptations are less appealing because the love we share with our spouses satisfies us because we know we're obeying God's Word. And if you're not married then trust God who satisfies us more than any person can that waiting until marriage is worth it. Or if you don't sense at this time that need for marriage and you are satisfied with God alone right now, then rejoice in Him and glorify Him in your singleness.

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