

## WHERE DOES ADULTERY BEGIN?

(Matthew 5:27-30)

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Supposing you heard of a married friend of yours who ran off with another person, being guilty of the act of adultery, would this shock you? It most certainly should, for the sin of adultery 1) corrupts the human soul, 2) defiles the body, 3) destroys the marriage union and 4) weakens society. Yet but for the grace of God, this could be any one of us, for every Christian, because he has a sin nature, has the capacity to commit adultery. The Lord goes even further and states that every person is an adulterer or adulteress if there has been a secret lusting after another man's wife or another woman's husband.

**NOTE:** This section of scripture is not easy to preach on but it is God's Word and it is for the edification of His people. Without a proper understanding of the sinfulness of sin, there will never be any genuine holiness in the life of the true child of God, especially in the area of sexual behavior.

- B. The key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5:20: "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" Christ is contrasting the external, ritualistic righteousness of the hypocritical religious leaders in Jerusalem with true, internal righteousness that come from God. Christ tells his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if they are ever to demonstrate that they are truly saved people.

### II. THE LITERAL MEANING OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDEMENT Matthew 5:27

- A. "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time.*" -- This refers to the religious leaders in Judaism who had instituted many man-made rules and traditions and set them along side or even above God's law in the Old Testament. So wrapped up were these Jews in their externalism that they missed the spiritual meaning of the Mosaic Law.
- B. "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*" The Lord picks the Seventh Commandment to show the hypocrisy and externalism of the Jewish interpretation of the Mosaic Law. These religious men imagined that, as long as they were not guilty of the physical act of adultery, they had met the requirements of the Law. They insisted as long as they did not lie with another man's wife they were innocent. NOTE: This external keeping of the Law fed their egos and they became proud and prudish. They had a "holier than thou" attitude about life which is always the result of disgusting externalism.

### III. THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT Matt 5:28

- A. "But I say unto you," -- Jesus Christ as the supreme law-giver now gives the spiritual meaning to the Seventh Commandment. He gives an interpretation that goes beyond the letter of the Law to the deeper spiritual meaning.

B. "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." -- Adultery refers not only to extra-marital sex but also premarital. Also to homosexuality. And deliberate mental contemplation of these sins. This refers just as much to woman lusting after men. Our Lord now goes back beyond the sinful act of adultery to the motives that caused this act. The real sin occurred in the person's mind when the secret thoughts of lust were permitted to have lodging. **NOTE:** The religious Jew, who was so proud of this externalism, is humbled before a holy God. Christ says that if a man allows himself to gaze upon a woman till his appetites are excited and sexual thoughts stimulated, then the holy Law of God judges him to be guilty of adultery, even though providence thwart the execution of his plans.

1. This verse has been greatly misunderstood. It is not wrong to look at a woman and appreciate her beauty. What the Lord condemns here is the looking after a woman for the purpose of lusting after her. The involuntary desire is not described as sin. The normal, red-blooded man has a God-implanted appetite for the opposite sex. This appetite is not wrong but yielding to it in an improper way is sin. To purposely gaze after a woman with evil desire is sin. Christ says this is tantamount to adultery, for this is exactly what it is that motivates a man to commit adultery.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Billy Graham says that "The first look at a woman is the look of appreciation; the second a look of attraction. Neither of these is sinful. But when he goes back for the third and fourth look, this is lust.

2. Note carefully that it is not sex that God is forbidding but it is the perversion of sex. God has ordained sex for marriage, which is holy, right and good. i.e. Song of Solomon.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Is it wrong to lust for my husband? It is not lust but love and a God-given desire finding God-approved action. In particular our Lord is thinking about extra-marital relations whether it be the act or just in the mind. -- Carolyn White

In particular our Lord is thinking about extra-marital relations whether it be the act or just in the mind. Any unlawful sex outside of marriage is forbidden, even mental lusting.

What the externally religious person never discovers is that sin is not just external it is internal. All sin had its beginnings in man's sinful nature -- *Mark 7:21-23 (Living Gospels): For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly. All these vile things come from within; they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God.*

Man's real problem is a disease of the heart; therefore sin must be dealt with as an internal principle as well as an external act.

Real adultery can be committed in the mind. There are people today, respectable men and women, who have never committed an act of adultery. But they enjoy sinning in the mind and entertaining themselves with the excitement of imagined situations.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Motivation behind what we put in the mind. Why does a man or woman read all the details of divorce cases in the newspapers? Is it a legal interest or a social one? Perhaps he enjoys it. Oh, he may not do this thing in person, but he repeats it over and over by proxy. Men read the reviews of a book and find it contains something about a man's sin, and they buy the book. Or they hear about some racy scene in a movie and they feel they must go. Do they buy the book or go to the movie because they have a general sociological interest in life. Often this is not the case. It is because of the love for the thing. It is sin in the heart!

#### IV. **THE WARNING TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS (5:29, 30)**

*“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”* -- Now our Lord wants to warn believers about the wanton look after the opposite sex. The key for a man (or a woman) is to avoid situations, which will cause him to have this lustful look.

**NOTE:** Obviously this is figurative language. To pluck out one's eye or to cut off one's hand, this would not remove one's lustful desire. The Lord Jesus is telling His disciples in the strongest possible language to remove every occasion for this type of sin.

**NOTE:** There is a type of woman that delights to incite the lusts of men. Any man that has red blood coming through his veins can be so incited. Therefore Christ says to avoid contact with such a woman or any associations that would cause you to think about her. There is a difference between attractive and “seductive.”

**ILLUSTRATION:** Real adultery can be committed in the mind. There are people today, respectable men and women, who have never committed an act of adultery. But they enjoy sinning in the mind and entertaining themselves with the excitement of imagined situations. Why does a man or woman read all the details of divorce cases in the newspapers? Is it a legal interest or a social one? Perhaps he enjoys it. Oh, he may not do this thing in person, but he repeats it over and over by proxy. Men read the reviews of a book and find it contains something about a man's sin, and they buy the book. Or they hear about some racy scene in a movie and they feel they must go. Do they buy the book or go to the movie because they have a general sociological interest in life. Often this is not the case. It is because of the love for the thing. It is sin in the heart.

- A. It is a common thing for men, even Christian men, to lust after women in their minds. This also applies to women but perhaps to a lesser degree. How do we cope with these secret lusts? When this thing is in the temptation or incubator stage, the first thing to do is claim the death of Christ for this sinful passion and put on Christ (Rom. 13:14). If the temptation persists, the second thing is to fight the evil thought by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit by putting it to death. (Col. 3:5). If we find ourselves about to be overtaken with lust after some woman, the third thing to do, if possible, is to flee from her presence. It comes to this point one should not try to rationalize his situation or pray about it, he should flee, for God says, (“Flee youthful lusts”) (II Tim. 2:22) and (“Flee fornication”) (I Cor. 6:18).

- B. What happens if we mentally yield to the sin of adultery? We must confess this sin immediately. But what if the thought comes back again and again? We keep on confessing it and claiming the death of Christ.

**NOTE:** The very fact that the Christian desires to fight mental adultery proves that he or she is a true child of God, for it demonstrates that Christ is truly in one's life.

- C. A person may ask at this point, ("What happens if I, as a Christian commit adultery? Am I lost?") It is true that the Christian has the capacity for any type of sin but he also has the Holy Spirit to help him overcome it. It is possible for a Christian, however, to commit the act of adultery but the price for that sin is very high. The Christian will incur the discipline of God, he may lose his wife and family, it will affect him socially, it will corrupt his soul, pollute his own body, it will produce great guilt and it will cause loss of testimony. Yes, there is forgiveness for the Christian but the damage done because of yielding to sin may be irreparable. Those who willfully chose to sin, must be willing to pay the consequences of that sin and the discipline of God may have lifetime effects.

**POINT:** No Christian could commit adultery and not come under great conviction from God that this thing is wrong. The professing Christian who is guilty of habitual adultery is not saved at all.

## V. **CONCLUSION:**

**SAVED:** I am confident that almost all of the Christians in this room could say openly and honestly that they have kept the letter of the Seventh Commandment and have been true to their God-given partners, and we praise God for that. But there are no Christians in this room that can say that they have kept the spirit of the Seventh Commandment, for everyone, who is accountable before God, has been guilty of mental adultery. But Christian, thank God that Christ died for your sins. You have a Saviour who has taken upon Himself the guilt and penalty of your sins and you shall never be eternally judged for them! Oh the grace of God, oh the Love of God that is ours because we are in Christ. There is no end to understanding it!

**UNSAVED:** For you here this morning without Christ, perhaps you have been guilty of the physical act of adultery. For sure, you have been guilty of mental adultery. Do you realize that someday you will give an account to God for these sins and God will pronounce eternal judgment on you? He will say to you when you come before his throne pleading mercy, ("Away from me I never knew you and He will cast you into the eternal hell!") Why will God judge you? Because you have no Saviour! Because you do not have one who has born the guilt of your sin and paid sins penalty for you. The Heavenly Father, the Judge of all the earth, accepts into His presence only those who have been forgiven by Christ and declared righteous in Christ. I plead with you to trust Christ before it is too late, for He alone can be your sin-bearer!