

Gruesome Strategy

If you would, open up your Bibles to Matthew 5. We are continuing in a series on fighting sexual sin and temptation. If you are that rare individual who still believes that you have no concern about sexual temptation—you have risen above the need to even think of these things—then apply everything you read in this chapter to whatever your particular besetting sin is, and it will be beneficial to you.

Matthew 5:27 is where we will begin. We are looking specifically for a strategy for killing lust and killing sin before it kills us. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” That is, you shall not have sex outside of marriage. “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent,” that is, intent in the mind, “has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” that is, in his affections and desires.

And then he gives us the strategy. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out. Gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members,” that is, one of your body parts, “than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand,” as precious as your right hand is to you, “provokes you to sin, cut it off.” Dismember yourself. Throw it away. “For it is better that you lose one of your body parts than that your whole body go to hell.”

Wow. Pretty gruesome, right? The strategy here that we are given is to gouge out the eyeball, to dismember your hand. He says in another place to cut off your right foot if it leads you to sin. He is explaining to the traditionalists and the conservatives of his day that sin is deeper than they think. “Sin is not just external; it’s not just physical. Sin is deep. Don’t be so shallow; don’t be so superficial.”

And the law of God is deeper than you think as well. The law of God is not just concerned with whether or not you have performed the actual deed of adultery, but whether or not you want to, whether or not you are looking to—whether or not it has captured your imagination and entered your heart.

Whether or not you follow through with the deed, whether or not you have the opportunity to, whether or not you have the opportunity but you don’t do it because there are secondary motives that are restraining you—all of that is besides the point if you intend it in your mind and if you desire it in your heart. If you’re wanting and desiring and using your eyeballs to scan the terrain for these purposes, then God attributes to you the sin of adultery and all of the consequences that come with it.

Jesus is teaching this to a traditionalist, conservative society and what this means—and this is the main point of the text—is that everyone, without God doing some special work, is on their way to hell; that under the law of God, no one can stand. Under the law of God and all of its depth—all of its gravity—no one is innocent. All mouths are shut.

The law of God comes and it condemns. Whether you have sinned in the body, the head, or the heart, the law of God condemns you, and what this means mostly is that you desperately need someone to save you from yourself—from the law of sin and death. And that person’s name is Jesus Christ. That’s the main point of this text.

But we are in a series on fighting sexual temptation and we are looking for a particular strategy, and the strategy is: Gouge out your eyeball; cut off your hand. It’s kind of crazy! It’s

very gruesome, bloody, and gruelling. Why does he use this illustration? I think it's fitting. This illustration is gruesome because he is conveying the violence with which you must fight sin.

Violent Strategy

The Bible teaches us that the kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force (Matthew 11:12). It took me a long time, a lot of Bible study, and a lot of personal experience in the struggle against sin to finally understand what that verse means, that "the kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." That means that only the violent go to heaven. Not violent against others, but violent against the self and violent against the sin of the heart.

And ironically, those who are the most violent with their own sin are the most gentle with others. The kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent take it by force. The Bible teaches clearly that only those who overcome and conquer shall inherit the kingdom of heaven and that all those who fall back in cowardice and refuse to fight sin and self shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. The Christian life is to be characterized by fighting, by violence—by making war—illustrated by gouging out eyes and cutting off hands. That's how serious it is and that's how hard you should fight.

I would like to leave that illustration a little bit and lay out for you in a statement what Jesus is calling us to do—what the strategy is: We are, in the fight against sexual temptation and sin, to jealously guard the access points to the head, the heart, and the soul from anything and everything that would provoke us to sin, physically, emotionally, or mentally.

Let's break that down. We are to jealously guard the access points. What are the access points? Jesus gives us two illustrations. He says one access point to your head, heart, and soul is the eyes, by illustration of the man or woman who is looking with intent in the mind to lust in the heart. He also talks about the hands, but I think by extrapolation, we can also say the ears. He's talking about the senses. Seeing and hearing and touching. We are to carefully guard the senses.

Imagine a castle. It has massive walls and is strongly guarded everywhere except for at the gate—the access point. The gate is necessary because inhabitants on the inside need to interact with those on the outside. They need to have import and export; they need to be able to bring in supplies and to send out troops.

You need to have access points. You have to have senses; that's how we interact with the outside world and how the outside world interacts with us. But Jesus is saying that the access points are a particular vulnerability in your life. It's the eyes, hands, and ears. It is those that you must be careful to jealously guard.

At times, when the enemy approaches, you must raise up the drawbridge, slam shut the gates, bar the doors, set a watch on the towers, and defend your position. Jealously guard the access points to your soul, which are your eyes and your ears. From what? From anything that would provoke us to mental, emotional, or physical sin.

Guarding Strategy

Now what would provoke us to mental, emotional, or physical sin? Obviously, sensual images. Jealously, violently, vehemently, vigorously guard the access points to your soul from anything and everything that would get inside of you and find a fertile feeding ground and a willing host to grow. That means guard yourself from sensual and forbidden images.

This means also that we are not to give ourselves over to the heavy breathing scenes that we read in romantic novels. We are not to live vicariously through the woman as she is embraced by Mr. Right—he who is all things her husband is not. We must jealously guard the access points of our soul from that which would come inside of us and give us an intent to crave and to need and to want and to lust.

I am not saying that it's the "bad stuff" outside of us and the "good stuff" inside and we need to make sure we keep the "bad stuff" out. No; Jesus says clearly that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him but that which comes out of his heart that defiles him (Matthew 15:11). I am saying clearly that we are to guard, not from getting cooties inside of us, but from anything that would get inside of us and stir us up—grab a hold of our hearts and capture our imagination, us being the sinful people that we are.

This is not just sensual imagery and "forbidden things"; this is also sometimes good things. Good things outside of us can sometimes be seen to us as fulfilling and satisfying in and of themselves. And we can look at them with intent to have them, and they may not even know about it and not even be a bad thing, but we are looking at it with a need and hunger—idolatry. Even good things! We must be careful that they not capture our imagination, that they not substitute for Jesus Christ in our lives.

I think of the young lady who sees other marriages in her church, and they're not what her marriage is. She sees other husbands who are "so much more"; she wants a husband like that. She's not looking at a bad thing; she's looking at a good thing, but looking with intent to covet. "If only I had *that* husband. If only I had *that* tidy, lovely relationship. If only I had *that* family situation. Look at the house with the white picket fence! Look at the squeaky clean, beautiful, behaved children! If only I had that, my life would then be complete and I would be satisfied."

That's a lie. But you say that is how you've coped with life as long as you can remember. That is how you feel affirmed. In that fantasy relationship online in which this person is just *everything* your husband is not, he's so wonderful and loving! Of course he is! He's not living with you! You're not doing his laundry and making him food. That's not a real relationship; of course he's perfect! He's minding his manners because he's using you! (And you're using him.)

But you're looking at that relationship online and you say that's how you've coped your whole marriage. That's how you feel affirmed; that's how you have your emotional stability. He fills all your emotional needs. She fills all your emotional needs. You have no respect in your life; you don't have a girlfriend or a wife.

This is how you've gone through your life feeling powerful and respected. This is how you've always coped with the monotony and boredom of life. This is how you've always coped with your jerk for a boss; you've always gone to be with yourself and this is how you've coped. I'm

saying to you that you have to guard the access points of your soul from *that*, which is provoking you to sin, and you don't think you can do it.

Jesus says to you this morning that even if it's as precious to you as your right hand or foot, *cut it off*. Even if you depend on it as much as you depend on your right foot—that's how you access life, how you get what you need, it's what you stand on and depend on every day—it's not worth your soul.

If I were to develop an infection in my foot and were a typical man, I'd refuse to go to the doctor—because my body can kill that infection because it's so manly and I just don't have time, not wanting to change my routine. But when I finally would go to the doctor, he would say to me that I've waited too long and now I have a gangrene infection. He might say, "You may need to have a seat, because the only way to deal with this is amputation."

If I were to say, "Wait, that's my right foot!" You would understand. That would be traumatic and emotional. It would hurt for a long time. It would take a long time for me to develop new ways of life that no longer depended on that foot, and that would be painful. I would have to learn life all over again; I would have to learn to walk all over again. That would be hard and painful because I've depended on my right foot for so long. But I would still eventually say, "It's not worth my life; cut it off." Only a delusional, insane soccer player would say otherwise.

A right foot is not life. If I said, "Oh, I can't live without that! Life's not worth living without my foot!" you'd think I was insane. I would be tied down; they'd cut my foot off without my consent. And Jesus says likewise. Those moments of a palpitating heart and those fleeting feelings of affirmation—and that dopamine rush that you live for and that is a habit to you—is not worth your soul. It's not worth an eternity in hell.

I know that, based on a recent survey, 97% of citizens in Acadiana believe in the existence of hell. I'm going to guess that there's probably a small number of you that don't believe in hell, so I'm not going to make a case for the existence of hell. But I know that the percentage would not be the same should we do a survey asking "Do you go to hell for persisting in sexual sin?"

Very few would say, "Well, of course; Jesus says so." Even Christians sitting in the pews, who have been deluded by the sexual revolution and false teachings concerning the scriptures and how we even read them, would say, "So you're saying that if I don't turn from sexual sin and I don't fight it that I'm going to go to hell?" Yes.

I'm not saying it. I'm just reading the verses here. Why? This is the easy explanation: When you violate God's laws—he is a judge—there are legal penalties. Let me give you another one. Think about it this way: Marriage was created by God as an illustration of Christ's relationship with the church. Now, what's Christ's relationship with the church like?

It is characterized by giving, serving, and laying down his life for his bride. It is characterized by a promise and a faithfulness to go to the very death for his bride, to see his bride in all her nakedness and shame, to accept her as she is and love her until his dying day—to, in fact, die for her.

Selfless Strategy

Marriage is about giving, serving, accepting, loving, and dying for the other. That is a covenantal relationship. Sex, as the Bible says, is to be inside of that covenantal relationship of

giving and serving and accepting and openness and love and dying daily for one another. Sex is to be inside of that, as a ritual—a physical demonstration of its invisible realities.

Let me say it this way: In a covenantal marriage, when you promise to never “quit” another person, to be there for another person “until death do you part,” you are virtually saying, “Regardless of whether or not the costs outweigh the benefits, of whether or not you walk on me and offend me, I will give myself to you till my dying day. I promise to be there for you completely. We are to be two as one relationally, spiritually, psychologically, and economically.” And the outward, physical display of that is sex. It is, in a sense, the ritual, the sacrament, of marriage.

Baptism, for example, is very physical and very real. It involves water, grabbing someone and shoving them under the water and pulling them out. It’s strange, admittedly. It is a physical, real thing. It is a ritual that everyone can see and that the person experiences. And the Bible teaches us that it is a physical manifestation of a spiritual reality that has happened inside of the person’s heart.

They have been spiritually baptized, immersed in the Holy Spirit, and joined with Jesus in death, burial, and resurrection. And what do you call a person who wants to get baptized who doesn’t love Jesus, who has not been spiritually baptized, has no real relationship with Christ, and has not ever really been buried to sin and raised with Christ, but wants to show everyone how righteous they are? A fake, a phony—a hypocrite.

Yet in marriage, a covenant with spiritual realities, where you are in union spiritually, relationally, economically, psychologically, emotionally, and in every way, sex is the physical manifestation of that spiritual bond. Everybody wants to do it physically, but not spiritually, emotionally, mentally, psychologically, or economically. They want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to have sex with no strings attached.

Inside of marriage, sex is about giving and accepting and being vulnerable—seeing the other for who they are and loving them. Outside, it’s all about marketing. It’s all about sizing each other up. It’s all about having needs and cravings and “loving” the other person for meeting them. And the other person has needs, so you have a sort of retail agreement that as long as you meet each other’s needs, you’re going to be okay.

But as soon as the other person stops meeting your needs, you’re going to be looking for an upgrade. Sex outside of marriage is a retail exchange—a consumer good. Inside of marriage, it is a beautiful, grace-giving, affirming display of what is actually true. Outside of marriage, you’re a hypocrite. You’re a user, a taker, and an exploiter in a relationship of mutual usury.

The heart of sex outside of marriage is selfishness. Inside of marriage, it’s selfless (or we’re working on it, at least). Outside of marriage, it’s all self-centered, about “my” needs; “I really love you loving me.” And hell, in essence, is selfish. In other words, sex outside of marriage is selfish, and when you are engaged in that, you are on the highway of hell that leads to the realm in which you get to be all by yourself.

Where do unjust exploiters and users and self-centered spiritual blackholes go? Not where God is. Only those who live for the glory of God and have the love of Christ inside of them that flows out to others will be in heaven. That’s the essence of heaven: love and giving and selflessness. The essence of hell is taking and exploitation and *selfishness*.

The point I'm trying to make to you is that there are legal punishments that God bestows on those who refuse to repent. But he killed his son, Jesus Christ, so that you can be forgiven for that. But there's also the natural, inevitable result of living a self-centered life. You get to go be with your god, the self, for all eternity. You chose it; you lived that way. You are, in essence, *like* that.

So that's why Jesus says, "That selfish behavior, that frictionless, self-centered, self-indulging, exploitative using that you're doing alone in the dark—those eyes that look to women to meet your hungry needs—I don't care how precious it is to you; cut it off before it kills you!"

Bottomless Strategy

Pressing in a bit further, Jesus doesn't say "Watch out for 'looking.'" You have to have eyes; they're good. He says, "Gouge out the eyes that look *with intent to lust*." Now, you know "lust" is not necessarily a sexual thing. And that word he uses right there is rarely used for sexual sin. That word he uses right there is *always* used for idolatry, though, and if you've been under Christ Church's teaching long enough, you already have the category for that. That means you're looking to good things to take the place of Christ for you.

But another illustration that I think would help is that the word "lust" is very often used for the sin of greed. Jesus says, "Gouge out *greedy* eyes." It can be used to talk about hunger, or being hungry. Cut off greedy, grabbing hands that feel so empty that they're always having to grab and hoard. And watch out for hungry eyes that are so starving inside that they see everything as a potential meal.

For example, pornography turns sex into a consumer good. A consumer good is for the purpose of being consumed. Pornography, in its essence, is a man or woman's hungry eyes reaching out and feeding on something. They have an insatiable appetite—an emptiness that reaches out and latches hold of something and feeds on it.

And like with any appetite, especially when you're trying to fill it with things in this world, it is never satisfied. The more you eat, the more your appetite expands until it eventually expands beyond the images on your computer screen into your very own relationships. It then sets out to consume all of those around you as you force expectations on them to fill your insatiable appetite. But no human can fill that. No one can drive over that bridge without it breaking.

You're like a cow; you chew your cud and swallow it, but you're not done there. You regurgitate in mental imagery and you chew it some more, swallow it, and regurgitate it all over again. Same thing with sex outside of marriage. It's all about meeting a need. It's all about hunger. It's all about needing more and more and more.

And it will never fill you up. The same thing with the young woman who looks to marriage, sex, and romance and says, "If only I had *that*, then my life would be complete." She is looking at that from a place of incompleteness. She's starving. She thinks that's the buffet that will finally fill her, but it's not.

Gospel Strategy

How do we stop that? This is easier said than done, gouging out hungry eyes. You can stop looking at certain things, but does that take care of the hunger? You can turn off the TV and stop watching certain shows—and you should—but does that necessarily fill you? No. You have to turn off the TV and turn something else on. You have to stop dining at this table and dine at another table. You have to stop drinking from this empty well and drink from a new well that can actually satisfy you. The reason hungry eyes are so difficult to gouge out is that hungry eyes come from a hungry soul.

And into that void of the hungry soul comes the messengers and the prophets of the sexual revolution. And they come with their gospel of satisfaction and identity: “You know what you’ve been lacking all along? You weren’t in touch with your actual identity! What you need to do to be saved from this emptiness and hunger is to throw off the shackles of Judeo-Christian sexual ethic and embrace the new ethic that says, ‘All is good and right as long as you consent,’ and then you will be satisfied.”

But while they preach the gospel of satisfaction through sexual promiscuity, they sing songs with words like “I can’t get no satisfaction.” Because they can’t, and you can’t either. Every idol has its prophets. Every idol has its wordsmiths and its poets to sing of its “good news.” The sexual revolution says to you, “*This* is what you’ve been missing all along; this is the good news; this is where your soul can be fed!”

But at the same time as the gospel of the sexual revolution enters into your eyes and ears through your radio, TV, curriculum, friends, and society at large, the word of God comes to you by means of the Spirit by *his* prophets and *his* messengers and says that Christ is the bread that fell down from heaven. Christ is the water that flows from the rock, and if you would drink from *him* you would finally be satisfied. You’d finally have your soul’s thirst quenched. This chapter is all about reminding you of that. It may even be about telling you for the first time.

The greatest story to illustrate this is from the gospel of John (John 4:11-29), and it’s a story called “The Woman at the Well.” The woman at the well was a Samaritan woman who daily walked to Jacob’s well because she lived in a desert and water was not easily found. She lived with a physical thirst and so every day she had to go to this well and get water from it.

And it was there that Jesus met her. He said to her, “Give me a drink” (v.7). And that surprised her, because he was a Jew and she was a Gentile (v.9). So that got her attention. She gave him a drink of water, and he said, “If you would ask *me* for a drink of water, I can give you some water and you never thirst again. I have water than can truly quench your thirst” (v.10, 14).

And she, of course, like all of us would, is thinking physically. And so she says, “Sir, please give me that water!” (v.15). She didn’t want to continue every single day in this desert region going all the way to this well. She had been working so hard and striving and engaging just to get a tiny little sip every day from this well.

And you know what Jesus did? He said, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” She said, “I have no husband.” And he said, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.” And she said, rightly so, “Sir, I perceive you are a prophet” (v.16-19). He has showed to her that the well she was really going to was men—romance.

And she had been to that well five times. And she was still going. Jesus is saying to her, “I have a water that will satisfy your soul. You don’t have to keep going to that. You can gouge out

those hungry eyes if and when you would feed on me.” And we know from the story that she did turn from her sin. She followed after Christ and became a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 28-29).

She admitted all that she had done. She was given forgiveness and pardon for her sins. And she began then to no longer drink from the well of sex and romance and “Mr. Right.” She quit drinking from that well of fantasies and daydreams and began to daily go to the well that is Christ Jesus. He said, “If you are thirsty, come to me, and I will give you a drink” (John 7:37).

This, Church, is the solution. You have to feed on Christ daily if you’re going to have any hope of gouging out those hungry eyes of yours. Let’s pray for help with this:

“Father, we ask you that you would give us the grace and strength we need to feed on you. You teach us that your word is food. Your son said ‘I don’t live on bread alone but on every word of God.’ Would we feed on the word, feed on the bread? As we feast at the Lord’s table, would we open up our eyes and look with a righteous lust and greed at you and let you get into our head and heart and capture our imagination?

“Would you get inside and dethrone the pornography and adultery and the hunger and fill our appetites? Would you do it through the means of prayer and the Lord’s table and worship? Would we not be distracted but drink from your well that we might leave full, equipped for the days ahead? Would we be given the grace and the strength to every day drink from your well that we might engage with the world full and not hungry? We ask this in Christ’s name. Amen.”