

Introduction

How ironic. I noticed that Hugh Hefner died this week. Here was a man who built a multi-billion dollar industry based on human lust. Although his magazine waned in recent years, it was not because the human drive for illicit sexuality waned. No. Even he recognized that what once was sold in print was now available in abundance for free with but the click of a mouse. John Piper posted the following on facebook: Hugh Hefner. Dead. And oh what a legacy of death. Let the empire fall.

Jesus would have said no less. He speaks about lust and sexual immorality with weight and clarity in our text this morning.

[Read Text and Pray]

I. What Was Said

A. As we saw last week in the section before, when Jesus was dealing with murder, he was targeting the teaching that the people had heard from the scribes and Pharisees. "You have heard that it was said." These are the words by which he identified the target. Jesus identified the reductionist teaching and then he spoke to correct it. "But I say to you." In the case of murder. Jesus' intent was to point out that the law speaks to more than the surface or fruit sin. It speaks also to the root of sin in the heart. The error of the scribes and Pharisees was to focus ONLY on actual murder and ONLY on an earthly consequence for it.

Jesus countered the error by declaring that murder is committed at the root level as well. This law against murder is broken in the heart and with the mouth as surely as it is committed by bringing someone's heart to stop beating.

People are always trying to find space to be comfortable committing sin. We are driven by our sin nature in the direction of relaxing God's law. The question often being asked is "how far can I go" down a given road before I

start committing sin. But the very point Jesus is making here is that sin starts in the heart. Every mile you travel down the road in the direction of sin, every advance you make from the root toward the fruit of sin, is sin.

Don't ask, "How far can I go?" If you have to ask that question, then you are already in sin. What Jesus shows us in regard to the 6th commandment is that the road to a fruit sin is a road that is sin at its very root.

B. Jesus is teaching the same fundamental truth now in verses 27-30 in regard to the 7th commandment. In order to accomplish his objective, he began with what was being said. The scribes and the Pharisees taught the 7th commandment. "You shall not commit adultery." This is the very verbiage expressed in the law of God given in Exodus. The commandment is given against the fruit sin of adultery.

This is a teaching that permeates the Bible. God made human beings sexual. And God ordained marriage. And he ordained marriage as the perfect and righteous setting for sexual expression. All other settings are sinful. The 7th commandment is abundantly clear. To establish and maintain the sanctity of marriage, God proscribes, that is he forbids by law committing adultery.

To commit adultery is defined by contemporary dictionaries as sexual intercourse between a married person and one who is not his or her spouse. In contrast, the Bible considers it adultery when there is intercourse with anyone other than the person to whom they are married. That is to say that fornication prior to marriage is equally forbidden by the 7th commandment as is sex outside marriage.

The Bible is abundantly clear that sexual expression within the bonds of marriage is a gift of God to be enjoyed and delighted in.

Genesis 2:24 – Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Proverbs 5:15-19 – Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in

the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth . . . Let her . . . fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

Corresponding to the delight which the Bible upholds for sex in marriage, it is abundantly clear that acts which violate the marriage covenant are serious infractions of God's law. God's disdain for them is intense. The Mosaic law called for the stoning of adulterers. And the New Testament warns of severest judgment for those whose lives is characterized by adultery.

When Paul urged the Thessalonians to abstain from sexual immorality, he solemnly warned them that "the Lord is an avenger in all these things."
1 Thessalonians 4:6.

Hebrews 13:4 – Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

1 Corinthians 6:9 – . . . the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God . . . neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy," and the list goes on.

Our society may not take the sanctity of marriage seriously. The sexual revolution that has opened the floodgates of human passions and lusts may be seen by many as progress. But the God who designed male and female and gave them the gift of marriage and love and sex in that relationship is serious. He means business. He knows what is best for us. He knows how human happiness can be maximized. The sexual revolution has descended upon this land not like a soothing summer breeze but as a hurricane like Harvey and Irma and Maria. It has left destruction, dysfunction, disappointment, and death in its wake. Families, individuals, health, and happiness have all taken it on the chin. And God will not forget the purveyors of the destruction.

Whenever the law of God is held up, our generation considers it intrusive, limiting, old-fashioned, out-dated, and judgmental. They reason that if

people love each other and something makes them happy that is all that matters. God would not want us to be unhappy would he? But God has given the path to happiness in the form of his commands. Obey him if you want to be happy. It does not matter how infatuated a couple may be with each other. Sexual relations outside marriage are forbidden by God. To act in opposition to the commands of God to satisfy the destructive cravings of their flesh, is to commit brazen and heinous sin against God. And there will be consequences.

C. It may help for us to consider the underlying reason why God is so protective of marriage and the sexual aspect of it. Why does he want it to be held in such honor and the bed be undefiled. It underlies the very purpose for which God instituted marriage. From the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and he has done so for his own glory, to manifest himself and demonstrate his greatness and the wonder of his interaction with his creation. And so it is with marriage. Marriage was instituted to glorify God. How so? Some might say it was so that there would be children. Well procreation is a purpose for marriage but not THE purpose. THE purpose is to be a living breathing reality that expresses an even greater beauty and glory and that is the beauty and glory of the union between Christ Jesus and the church.

In Ephesians 5, Paul instructs wives to respect and submit to their husbands and he instructs husbands 5 times to love their wives. Wives depict the church submitting to Christ. Husbands depict Christ giving himself for the well-being of the church. Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives as Christ does the church. And why? Paul says, because we are members of his body. And therefore, says Paul, the two shall become one flesh. And the very next words are these: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Sexuality in marriage, then, the two becoming one flesh, is a living experiential witness to the intimacy, delight, and exhilaration Christ and the church have in being united together as one. Marriage preaches the gospel. Christ Jesus lays down his life to present to himself a once polluted bride. Now through his death she is cleansed and set apart to come to him in the consummation without any spot or blemish to be united eternally. There is no love story as great as this! Doesn't it make you glad to be a part of the church? For some of you does it make

you want to be a part with the church? Marital union preaches the joy and delight of the gospel. It reminds us of incredible love and devotion and joy and delight that abide in our Savior! He commits no adultery and neither should we.

D. The scribes and Pharisees were not wrong to teach the people the sin of committing adultery. That part of what they were doing was incredibly right! It was not what they said that was the problem, but what they didn't say.

II. What Jesus Said

A. Jesus spoke with authority to correct what was being left out in the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. "But I say to you . . ." Again we will see that the fruit sin of adultery is not the only way the commandment is broken. It is not only broken when one commits physical adultery but also can be committed in the heart.

B. Jesus explains. "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." There are several key words here.

1. First is the word everyone. Jesus is not speaking to married people only but to everyone. Sexual purity is for everyone.

2. Second is the word looks. Its tense and form are significant. They indicate that what Jesus is talking about here is not an incidental glance but a studied gaze. It is not something that pops up in front of your face but which you seek out. It is not the first glance but the studied contemplation that he has in mind.

3. Third is the concept of lustful intent. The word used is to desire. It is the goal of the looking. Here we have a gaze that is driven to possess in the mind. And the context of adultery makes it clear that this looking is sexual in nature. This is why the translators have used the word lust. It is looking to possess that is driven by sexual desire. One is seeking sexual gratification by looking at another.

That sexual temptation abounds in our culture is something we easily recognize. It streams from billboards, television shows, movies, and books. And of course the internet is a danger zone especially because of the sense that no one else sees. A world that has thrown off prudish restraints is obsessed with sexual indulgence and experimentation on all levels. It is not just pictures but also literature. Looking, even listening, and reading for sexual pleasure all qualify as "looking with lustful intent."

4. We have already spoken of adultery, so the fourth concept is the heart. The second look is a sinful look. The intentional gaze is an adulterous one. One may not have committed physical adultery, but it is adultery nonetheless in one's heart already. You see, God looks not just on the outside where sins are observed by men. God studies the heart. He weighs the thoughts and intentions. One of the main things that was wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is that they didn't consider their hearts. It was all about the surface as though the heart does not matter. But Jesus is clarifying that God does not want your outward hypocritical show. He wants the affection of your heart. He wants you to obey him not simply to get by. He wants an obedience that flows from the heart.

You love him to the extent that you are willing to say a resounding "no" to the longings of the flesh.

C. Now your reaction to this teaching is likely to realize that you are an adulterer many times over. You are likely thinking, "this is an impossible standard! How can anyone do this?" I say, "Yeah, it's pretty much impossible to be perfect." And that is work of God's good law. When we look at his code of righteousness, it displays how wicked we are, how widespread is the hostility in our hearts to the standards of God and how countless times we have violated his commands. We are brazen sinners. Adultery permeates our hearts. We need a savior, a mediator, someone to make peace between us and God. Because of our disobedience we owe to God a debt we can never pay. The reality that sin has polluted us through and through should drive us to our knees and to our faces, poor in spirit and mourning our sin so that we meekly admit to God and everyone else that we are violators of God's righteousness from the heart.

How our sin displays that salvation cannot be earned or deserved. It must be dispensed by a merciful God or it will not exist. Oh for God's righteousness to sooth the sorrow and establish peace between God and us!

Good news! Good news! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome. He was tempted in all points like us. But he loved the Lord perfectly. He never committed adultery, not in body or in heart. The writer of Hebrews says, "Because He himself suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." He partook of flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil." He was made "like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

Oh we are such great sinners, but Jesus is such a great savior!

III. What Must Be Done

A. Having expounded a proper understanding of the 7th commandment, Jesus declares how sinful people who love God and have been reconciled to God and want to obey him in this area should respond. To put it succinctly, "Desperate sins call for desperate measures." Adultery is sin against God whether with the body or in the heart. Adultery condemns people to hell. People who profess to be saved but who persist in adultery as a lifestyle will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Adultery is a desperate sin. To keep yourself from it requires desperate measures.

B. If your right eye cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. If your right hand causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better to suffer in this way than for you to be thrown into hell.

Jesus wants us to see what is at stake here. And seeing what is at stake he recommends we take appropriate action. The appropriate action is whatever it takes. Pull out your eye. Cut off your hand. Jesus is speaking with hyperbole here. Cutting off your hand or plucking out your eye are not going to remove sinful impulses from your heart. But what actions can you take that will impede your inclination to sin?

Be accountable to someone. Get computer accountability software. Do away with your computer if you have to. Do what Job did, and make a covenant with your eyes. Abstain from tv and movies, certainly those that appeal to the lust of the flesh. Make no provision for the flesh. Control what you can and distance yourself from what you cannot.

Warning. Warning. Taking drastic actions will not change a darkened and corrupt heart into a pure heart. However, what John MacArthur says is true. He writes, "Just as the outward act of adultery reflects a heart that is already adulterous, the outward act of forsaking whatever is harmful reflects a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. That outward act is effective protection, because it comes from a heart that seeks to God's will instead of its own.

Conclusion

So much has been said this morning that speaks strongly to men. Women certainly are not excluded. Many women deal with these same temptations. Jesus is not excluding you because he addresses men specifically.

And yet there is a particular way which the principles of this text apply especially to ladies although men are not to be excepted either. If it is sinful to look lustfully, what is it to dress in such a way as to attract a sinful look? The other day I heard John Torres say, "Modest is the hottest."

What Jesus is teaching here corresponds to that. A. W. Pink reasons this way. "If lustful looking is so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and lusted after . . . are not less but perhaps more guilty." You know David was wrong with Bathsheba. He rightly bears incredible guilt. But Bathsheba played a role as well. When she was bathing on her rooftop, don't think for a minute that she didn't know she was in full view of the king's balcony. To sin is to sin. But to entice another to sin is being complicit with the devil.

This part of Jesus sermon reveals that we are all terribly broken. These things are shown us to help us be honest about the depth of our sin and about how to live in the pursuit of holiness, but they are also said in order to point us to the Lord Jesus who died for every lustful look and every

lustful enticement. Look to him. He is mindful that we are but dust. He was tempted in order to come to our aid.