

Sexual Immorality and You

The Ten Commandments

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We return to the seventh commandment today and I invite you to turn to Exodus 20. What I'd like to do to start here this morning, in addition to reading the text that we will consider, is to read the surrounding context, what that which is known as the Second Table of the law of God and just make some preliminary comments, picking up at the fifth commandment in verse 12 of Exodus 20 where it says,

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Those are commandments 5-10, and if you just kind of walk through them, you can kind of see a thematic way in which they develop. It starts with a principle of honoring authority which, of course, starts in the home with honoring your parents in the fifth commandment, and then it goes on to protect your neighbor's life, "You shall not commit murder," then you could say it goes on to say it protect your neighbor's wife, "You shall not commit adultery," then in the eighth commandment it protects your neighbor's property, "You shall not steal," verse 16, your neighbor's reputation, "You shall not bear false witness," and then it culminates in this great 10th commandment which I'm looking forward to getting to in a few weeks, this great commandment about contentment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife," and on it goes. One of the things that I want you to see as we're getting started here this morning is that just the Second Table of the law is very comprehensive, and as we've said many many times, the purpose of the law is to teach us about love. You know, this is not a matter of external restraint and behavior, this is an impossibly high standard of how we are to love our neighbor, and coming after an even higher standard, you might say, about how we are to love God in the first four commandments, the First Table of the law. But what we want to see is that as you progress through the commandments it goes from the cosmic and the vertical and narrows down to the human level, but it doesn't stop, beloved, it doesn't stop at the outward bounds of your being and what you do. The law, the moral law of God

proceeds right through your external person and goes straight to your heart when it says, "You shall not covet." You shall not covet. That's a matter that applies to the heart and not one of us could claim that we've met that standard, and we'll get to that, we'll get to that in due time. What's important for today's starting point is to recognize that in the law itself, in the 10 Commandments itself, it addresses the heart, the inner man, the affections of the human race and the affections of you individually so that when you understand that, you realize that the commandments taken as a whole it not only prohibits you to do certain things and commands you to do certain things, it also tells you to have right desires in your heart, to desire the good, to desire to love, to desire to forgive, to desire to be unified, and also to not have desires to do anything that would violate the negative prohibitions; that there would be nothing in your heart but that our hearts would be a clean and pure vessel unto the Lord, set apart for his service.

So when we come to today's commandment which is the seventh commandment found in verse 14, look at it there with me again, before you ever go to anywhere else in the Scripture you find how searching these things are. And in the seventh commandment, which we started last week, verse 14 says,

14. You shall not commit adultery.

And so if anyone reading the 10 Commandments reads them in context and takes them together, it's immediately clear that the commandment itself on its own terms in Exodus 20 itself is not merely prohibiting sensual physical contact but it is also prohibiting the desire for that and requiring a positive desire for pure love and purity to be the positive desires of the heart.

So least time, we looked at the biblical context of adultery, we saw how strongly God condemns adultery; in the Old Testament, as we saw, it required the death penalty in the nation of Israel, and going on into the New Testament we saw again and again and again how Scripture says that adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those who practice adultery, those who are unrepentant in their sexual sensual sin will find themselves one day excluded from the kingdom of God, sent away by Christ himself who said he will tell many, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." And as we said last time, you know, we're so accustomed to a sexualized culture that we just kind of take it for granted and we think it's no big deal. Well, when that's the case we have utterly lost sight of the holiness of God and we are merely confessing with that sentiment how worldly we are and how unlike God we are. God sets a fence around marriage, sets a fence around sexual purity and says, "You shall not transgress this. You shall not go there." It's an absolute prohibition never to do it even once. Not even once.

So the condemnation gives us a sense of the holiness of God and the high standard that he places on this and, you know, and so we're just trying to wake ourselves up and realize, do you know what? Here's the thing. I thought about this, this morning, and I'm glad I get the opportunity to say it. In our society and maybe in many of your own minds, whatever people want to do by way of physical intimacy is fine so long as there is consent. That's what our society has reduced everything about righteousness to, is there a matter of

consent involved or not between the parties, and if it is, consenting adults can do whatever they want. Well, that leaves out a really important factor, it leaves out the vertical factor of the God who created man in his own image, and God does not give his consent to any of it. God does not consent to any of it and you cannot partner together with people and by mutual consent violate, agree to sin against God like that and think that there's no consequence, to think of the fact that you're consenting to it means that it's okay. That's not true. That's not true at all. God condemns the lustful heart. He condemns the sensual relationship. He condemns the physical act. You know, we just need to step back and ask God to remove the scales from our eyes so that we would see this like he does and not simply judge our conduct by the surrounding environment in which we live. Beloved, we live in a fallen sinful world. You are swimming in polluted waters. You can't judge morality by what's acceptable in culture. You can't even judge it by what you feel like is okay in your own heart. We have to come to the law of God, get clarity from him, have the lights turned on in our dark minds so that we can see these things rightly and then when we do, we realize how far short we've fallen of his glory and it shuts us up to anything but the Lord Jesus Christ and his shed blood and righteousness for the hope of reconciliation with a holy God.

With all of those things said, let me remind you of an important passage. We'll spend most of our time in the New Testament today, we'll go back and forth a little bit, but I want you to turn to the gospel of Mark 7. You know, the longer that we've spent in the 10 Commandments, the more time we've spent in the Old Testament in Psalms on Tuesday nights where I hope that you'll renew your faithfulness to that aspect of our church life, the more I've been persuaded, the more you can see the profound unity that there is between the Old and New Testament on these kinds of principles. The New Testament isn't saying anything about the nature of God's moral law that wasn't already embedded in the moral law in the Old Testament; it brings it out with greater force, brings it out and interprets it in light of Christ but there is a deep profound unity to this and the matter that the 10th commandment prohibits coveting in the heart, you see Jesus expanding on that very theme about where evil comes from, where the evil in your life comes from, where all of the lust and where all of the anger and where all of the bitterness and grumbling and discontent, where it all comes from, it comes from your heart not from external provocations. And Jesus makes this very clear in Mark 7:20. Jesus was saying, Mark 7:20, look at it there with me, he says, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

So you might ask, why are you dwelling on this so much? Well, you know, we're all prone to self-righteousness and self-congratulation. We're all prone to think that we're better than we are and we're very experts at justifying ourselves, particularly justifying ourselves when we have bad things going on in our heart and we look for places to cast blame and all of that. This text is significant because it is a reminder that God sees our inner man and God judges us on our inner man, not by how people deal with us but by what is going on in our heart. And in 1 Samuel 16:7, you don't need to turn there, 1

Samuel 16:7 Scripture says, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." The heart. The heart. The heart. All of Scripture cries out to us and says, "It's the heart...the heart...the heart...the heart." It reverberates and echoes to call our attention to examine ourselves inside and not simply be content with some kind of external morality which isn't even as good as we think it is.

All of that prepares us to see the full import of the seventh commandment, and as we come to the seventh commandment, having read Exodus 20:14 and 17, I invite you to turn now to Matthew 5. We touched on this text last time. You know, the more the Lord gives me the privileges in ministry of opening his word, the more grateful I am for it even though I've become increasingly aware of how unworthy I am for the privilege that's been given to me, you know, and we should all feel something of that as we come to God's holy word, to realize he's given us a precious gift for us to be able to read, to learn his mind, and to do so while there is still a window of grace available for us to repent, to believe in Christ, for us to have the word, have its sanctifying effect for Jesus said, "Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth." So we come here and we come to a very significant text on this whole matter of adultery, lust and what the law means when it tells us, "You shall not commit adultery."

We see, first of all, if you're taking notes you can write this down: Jesus condemns mental adultery. Jesus condemns mental adultery which is another way of saying that the command prohibits lust in your heart. Maybe we should just make that the point: the command prohibits lust in your heart and everything from lust in your heart to the physical act, everything in between that is included. So we want to consider these things. That's point number 1. The point is that the law prohibits more than outward acts of sexual immorality and so we ask the question, then: well, then who is an adulterer? Who is the one that in God's eyes is guilty of adultery? Jesus explains this plainly beginning in verse 27. Let me read through verse 30. This is Jesus speaking,

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [Of course it goes the opposite direction, ladies.] 29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

What's Jesus saying? This is dramatic language, isn't it? The imagery that he uses is so severe in its imagery. Let's walk through what it is that Jesus is doing and why he is doing it and what he means by what he has said here.

At that time in the first century, the Pharisees who were the primary teachers of the law in Israel in the first century, they had so restricted and so narrowed the meaning of the seventh commandment that people thought that it only prohibited the physical act of

adultery and, you know, the whole idea of the inner aspect and the inner application of the law had totally been lost so that the Pharisees were grading external religion and multiplying the signs of their external religion but Jesus said inside they're full of dead men's bones, they were corrupt and completely lost.

So the Pharisees had narrowed it to the physical act of adultery. Now you and I, in one sense without even these words of Jesus, you and I know that that's wrong because it contradicts the immediate context of the 10 Commandments where it says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." We understand that it's wrong but Jesus needed to clear up the misconceptions and recover the true inner force of the moral law for his audience, and then through the Scriptures to protect the knowledge of this for all time. When you reduce it simply to physical acts or, young people, when you simply reduce the godliness of your relationship to the fact that you stop short of a certain point but you engage in everything up to that, you're acting like a Pharisee, you're evading and ignoring the force of what Jesus is saying, and as you stimulate those lusts in your heart either through images or through with another person, you are stimulating the things that violate this very commandment and Jesus says that's all wrong. He says you can't go by an external standard or, you know some kind of point of reference that you, yourself, have made up because that guts the law of God of its real force. It misrepresents the moral law of God from the very start. The whole starting point, the whole premise is wrong, in other words.

So Jesus as the ultimate authority gives it its true interpretation in verse 28. He is not changing the law. He is contradicting the interpretation of the law that existed in the first century and recovering what the law always meant in what he is saying here in verse 28 when he says, "but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Now Jesus says everyone who looks at a woman. We need to deal with a little bit of grammar here. In the original language, in the Greek language, that verb "looks" is in the Greek present tense. It doesn't mean something that's happening now. We use present tense to think about what's happening now in the course of time. The Greek language is a little different and had a different significance to it. The present tense in the Greek refers to something that is ongoing, something that is repeated, something that is habitual. You know, if you picture a movie clip, you know, you see an action take place over the course of time as opposed to a snapshot, for example, what happens in a moment, the present tense is referring to something that's happening over the course of time. So what he's saying here, what he's describing here is a man who is in one manner or another making an ongoing look at a woman, not simply an inadvertent glance, not passing on the street and saying, "Oh, that's inappropriate," and then moving on to something else. No, this is someone who is taking it in his heart to sit down and dwell there, you might say, mentally dwell there, to take it in and to ruminate and fantasize and all of those kinds of things. He's talking about an ongoing look, not an inadvertent glance that you immediately dismiss.

So what he's describing here is this, men, women, you know, this applies to all of us, what he's describing is this, he's describing a purposeful look at someone, these days, you know, it's not just the opposite sex where this comes up, he's describing a purposeful look to indulge a sexual desire that is in your heart. It's a purposeful look that says, "Oh, that

looks good and I want that. I'm going to process this in my mind." Not that anybody thinks and talks to themselves like that except for me apparently. But I'm describing the process of a desire taking hold of the heart and directing its course and directing what the eyes do because of something that is going on in the heart so that, to use an example from the life of David that we're all familiar with, you remember that David looked out and he saw Bathsheba bathing. Somewhere along the line, King David went from a first look that noticed what was happening to a lustful stare. Somewhere along that, he crossed a line and when he did, that desire took him as its slave and drove him into the adulterous affair that he had, the adulterous sin that he had with Bathsheba, but what you need to understand from the perspective of Jesus is that the physical consummation of that was simply the culmination of an adulterous sin that had already occurred in his heart before he ever told his guard to go and bring her to him. He had already been guilty of the spirit of adultery before his servants brought Bathsheba to him.

Now a little word of clarification here for which I'm happy to credit my friend Phil Johnson. He clarifies this in his messages. He says understand that the act of adultery is worse than the lustful thought. It is worse than that inasmuch as the act of murder is worse than an outburst of anger. However, what you must understand is that the external sin and the inner sin, they both grow from – listen to me carefully – they both grow from the same evil root, the same evil root that gives rise to the internal lust is giving rise to the act of adultery or inappropriate sensual behavior. They're growing from the same evil root and so they carry – watch this – they carry the same kind of guilt, it's the same guilt of an adulterous manner of man, it's the same kind of guilt even though it may be different by degree. The physical act is a greater degree of the same sin and thus is not perfectly equated on a 1:1 basis with an inner lust, but for the purposes of the moral law of God, for the purposes of us who want to understand what God requires, we understand that the same adulterous spirit is at work whether it is acted on physically or not, and in God's eyes that makes someone guilty of violating the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," in a way that brings the same kind of guilt between the man in the privacy of his room and the one who has frequented a house of ill-repute. They're both guilty of violating this commandment, they're just doing it in different ways.

That's pretty searching. What do those lusts show? Here's what they show, beloved: those evil lusts roaming about in your heart are showing that adulterous sin dwells in you and that's how God sees it. The spirit of adultery is in you and God who looks on the heart judges that. He sees that. He condemns that. Your desires show what is in your heart and they condemn you, and so this becomes very sobering. Remember what we said last time about the condemnation that attached to adultery. In the Old Testament it required the death penalty. In the New Testament it is clearly a cause for eternal judgment in hell. That's how God sees it. As God looks at us, as he looks at what is in our heart, he sees and he sees those lustful desires, what Christ is saying is that that is guilty enough to put you into hell even if you never act on it, even if no one ever knows on earth about it. God knows, God sees and God judges.

Now you might say, "But Jesus," you know, there are those that say, "Well, I prefer the Jesus that is all grace and love and forgiveness. You know, don't talk to me about hell and

judgment, let's talk about Jesus." Ha, let's do that! Let's do that. Let's talk about Jesus in this context. Let's talk about Jesus in this passage. What does Jesus himself say as he has introduced the sin of adultery and the sin of lust? Look at verse 29. He says, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." Look, Jesus himself, Jesus himself goes immediately from the sin of adultery, to the sin of lust, to the concept and the judgment of hell. There is no refuge for unrepentant adulterous people in Christ because Christ says when that defining sin is yours and you enjoy it and you're unrepentant in it, you're going to hell. And it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter if when you were six years old you made a profession of Christ to your momma when she was putting you to bed, and you were baptized by the Baptist preacher the next week. If sin is the mark and the controlling disposition of your heart, what you used to think was your conversion means nothing because it obviously wasn't a real conversion because real conversion puts the Holy Spirit in you, in real conversion you are born again and God gives you new desires and makes you a new creature in Christ, and you live according to that new nature. Not perfectly but in aspiration and direction and in pattern, you live according to those new desires that God puts in the truly converted if you're a genuine Christian. Unrepentant sin is the mark of someone who has never been saved no matter what their confession is. Jesus said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Luke 6:46. "Why insult My majesty? Why insult My office as the Ruler of creation if you're only going to do what you want to do and not what I say?"

There's no escaping this and, beloved, it is just so urgent for each one of you because, look, I just, you know, the nature of Scripture compels me to know and to understand and to grieve over the fact that many people in this room are not genuinely Christians even though they think they are. Jesus said, "Many will be cast away who called Me Lord." So it is urgent upon you to examine yourself, it is imperative for you to look deeply at yourself and say, "What really marks me? Is the marks of new life, do I love Christ, do I love holiness, or am I really just after what I want to do and I'm trusting that, you know, some show that I went to, what I mean by that is some religious thing that I did a few years ago or in my childhood, covers me for all of eternity and I can just sin without compunction about it?" That ain't true. You can't read the Bible with open eyes and think that that's true and I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I didn't warn you, you know, and I am not going to stand before the Lord and have him say, "You never warned them. You never warned them about the possibility of false conversion," and hang my head in shame after the ministry he's blessed me with. I'm not going to do that and so I warn you, each one, to examine yourself as Scripture says. You know, we're standing on a bridge between earth and eternity. Someone better wake up.

So what we see here as we consider what Jesus says, what we find is this, is that it is sinful even to desire what God forbids. There is probably a majority sentiment now in so-called Christian circles that want to excuse homosexuals and say it's okay for them to have the desire as long as they don't act upon it. That's not true. That's a damning lie. The desire shows a perverted heart and so we don't excuse the desire. Scripture doesn't do

that. Scripture warns us about the desires themselves and so it's sinful to desire what God forbids, it's sinful to covet after what someone else has even if you don't take it, and this is just true and found true throughout all of the commandments on the Second Table. But we are so conditioned to diminish and dismiss the holiness of God and to justify ourselves and to justify what we want to do that speaking broadly, speaking generally, we are happy to distort and misrepresent the law of God so that we can either do what we want to do or that people who want to do it will like us. And Christian pulpits and Christian scholars throughout our world are infected with this in a way that is profoundly dangerous and cannot begin to stand the scrutiny of God's word. You know, God's given me whatever platform he's given me and I'm going to say it.

You see, and as we consider these things, beloved, what you need to understand is this, is that when we consider the moral law of God as God's own word interprets it, we are seeing the depth of the righteousness that God requires. He requires perfection not only in your outer man but in your inner man as well. And beloved, and speaking to some of you young people particularly here at this moment, understand this, is that God requires from you heart virtue, positive heart virtue, godliness, the fruit of the Spirit, not merely your outward abstinence from physical acts, and the implications of that are just enormous.

In addition to what I've already said here this morning, let me quote from A. W. Pink who rightly applies this in another realm of life. He says this and I quote, he says, "If lustful looking be so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with desires to be looked at and lusted after are not less but even more guilty. In this matter, it is only too often the case that men sin but women tempt them to do so. How great then," continuing the quote, "How great then must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of our young men, and how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses." His point is obvious. I thought he said it well, that's why I quoted him. If the sin of lust is a violation of God's moral law, then those who would seek to stimulate that in someone else's heart are guilty of sin also even if they don't have the particular lust in their heart. If you're displaying yourself in a way to call attention in this manner to yourself, you're guilty of violating the commandment not to commit adultery. It's very far-reaching.

As we've said periodically throughout this series, the commandments aren't just, the significance of them isn't simply limited to the words that they use in a single verse, you know, they represent a category of all kinds of sins, the culminating one that's forbidden, but it's also describing a whole category of sins as we've been discussing here today. So we find ourselves leveled by the word of God here today, you know, and I've said this to you before that I'm not trying to hide the fact that I was that kind of man before my conversion. I'm a sinner saved by grace just like any of you that are Christians. That's the most that we can say about ourselves, we're sinners saved by grace. Not one of us are truly in a position to say, "I meet the law of God. I'm good enough for God. I'm going to heaven when I die because I'm a pretty good person." The law of God utterly dismantles and deconstructs that worldly view and leaves you with nothing else to say on your behalf. And until we somehow take that seriously, beloved, we're just playing games with

Jesus and the spiritual reality of the gospel, the spiritual reality of God's holiness is still foreign to us if we're not grappling deeply with those things.

You know, I was a young man. You look at me now and say, "Man, that must have been a long time ago." But you know, I remember my own arrogance, I remember my own arrogance about how easily I just dismissed all of this and just set it aside and still in my heart thought that I was a righteous person, I was a good person. I wasn't. I want nothing to do with that old man. I'm glad he's dead and gone. My point is that as I plead with you, as I earnestly plead with each one of you to take the word of God to heart and wherever, whatever the Spirit of God reveals to your mind, don't resist the fact that he's convicting you over your spiritual indifference, your sensuality, and the fact that you very well may not be a Christian. Better to come to grips with that now and go to the family and say, "Do you know what? I don't think I've ever been truly saved. In fact, I know that I've been a hypocrite all this time." Better to say that and put your faith in Christ and be saved by the work of the Holy Spirit in you, better that and for people to find out you've been playing the hypocrite all this time, better that than on the great day of judgment to have Christ say, "No. Go away." Take your pick, beloved. Choose which one you'd rather have, but if I were you I'd take the eternal perspective in mind and act accordingly, and flee to Christ while you have time. And if you're uncertain, as I was at the time of my conversion, just fall on your knees, beg him for mercy, say, "I don't know who I am or what I am but I know You're the solution. Have mercy on me, the sinner!" Then with a broken heart open his word and read it, put aside everything else including the events of later today for the sake of your own soul and to make God's word the priority in your life until the knowledge of Christ has been born in your soul, "For faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." If your Bible is not open, if you are not reading Scripture on a consistent basis, beloved, you have every reason to think that your soul is greatly deceived about whether you are in him or not. And I'm just too old to play games and try to soft-sugarcoat it.

So let's look at a second point here. We saw the condemnation of mental adultery. Second point, let's look at Jesus' cure for adultery. Jesus' cure of adultery and here we can kind of transition a little bit into addressing believers, whoever is a Christian here. Jesus proceeds to teach us how to respond to evil heart desires. It applies specifically in this matter of lust but it would apply to other sins in your heart, you know, of covetousness or grumbling spirit or gossip, you know, it all applies, it's all addressed by the same basic principle.

Look at verses 29 and 30 with me again. Just verse 29, Jesus says, having assumed a man who is lusting for women in his heart, here's his counsel, here's what you do. Verse 29, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Jesus here does something interesting. He switches to the singular form as he addresses in the pronouns. It's now singular. Now with the fullness of what we've seen from our exposition of the text, Jesus now comes and speaks directly to your heart with the second person singular "you." Talking to you personally, individually, and that makes the application more immediate to each individual hearer. Jesus is speaking to you now,

not to the crowd at large, not to the person sitting next to you, he's addressing your heart directly and, you know, through his word and through the work of the Holy Spirit powerfully directing things about your mind, to your attention, to your own soul. You know, it would be an utter waste of time for it to be any other way. It would be an utter waste of time and it would be a sin against God for you to sit in an audience like this, under a text like this, and say, "I know someone who needs to hear this." This is about you. Forget about everybody else and hear what Christ would say to you. Let him deal with your neighbor. Let him deal with the person that's sitting next to you. You apply your mind to your own soul and your own condition because that's what the second person singular is telling us to do.

So again here in this verse when it talks about if your right eye makes you stumble, the idea of stumbling there has the idea of something that's an ongoing pattern. If, beloved, there is something in your life that repeatedly makes you to stumble into these kinds of sins or whatever your personal besetting sin might be, you have to get rid of it. You have to get rid of it. That's what Jesus is saying. You know, we're gathered here in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we call him Lord which means he's master, which means he's boss, which means we recognize his moral authority to tell us what to do. We are under his authority and he speaks to us and says, "If this is you and you have something that is repeatedly causing you to sin, here's what you do about it."

Stumbling carries the idea of setting a trap or a snare, something that clutches you and won't let you go. It's that thing or that person that leads you into temptation and sin. What do you do with it? It's not that hard, you get rid of it. And Jesus uses hyperbole to make his point. "If your right eye," look at verse 29 with me, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you," get rid of it, and he makes a comparison, he says, "it would be better for you to lose one of your eyes, than it would be for your soul to go to hell forever." Just weigh the consequences of the two things and realize that there's no comparison here. It's a clarion call to repentance and not just a repentance that makes an outward display but in the words of John the Baptist bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. You say you're repentant? Great. Now do this in response to that assertion that you've repented of your sins. And Jesus says for the repentant person there's only one choice, you eliminate everything in your life which hinders your pursuit of righteousness. You eliminate everything in your life which hinders your pursuit of righteousness.

You say, "That's unreasonable. You don't realize that could cost me my job, that could cost me my reputation." Well, listen, listen, Jesus makes the rules. Jesus defines it and Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, look at it with me there, Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." He defines what your priorities must be and, yes, Christ comes and he is telling you how you are to be in your inner man. He's the God who looks on the heart. He has authority over the heart and he gets to tell you what it is that he requires. And this is filled in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at chapter 5, verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." The picture is as those dying of thirst and dying of hunger. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness like that, for they'll be satisfied." Verse 20

of chapter 5, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Chapter 5, verse 48, "you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Well, look, Christ is perfect in all of his inner man. That's the standard. God doesn't grade on a curve, 40% is not going to be an A. It's pass/fail. Pass 100%, everything else destruction.

Now as I've said, these vivid word pictures are not to be taken literally in the sense that Jesus is not commanding self-mutilation. That's not what he's doing here. The truth of the matter is Jesus is commanding something that is far more unattainable than self-mutilation. What he is commanding here is something far more than hacking off your hand because what he's commanding here is inner self-control of your inner man. If you would cast out an eye for the sake of righteousness, how much more should you get rid of something of lesser value that causes you to sin. And beloved, his point is this: you're willing to forsake that which causes you to stumble is an evidence of your desire for righteousness. The Puritans called it spiritual mortification, putting to death the things that cause us to sin.

And the form of the commands in the Greek text make it clear that it's urgent. Act on this now. Don't wait. Don't say tomorrow. Don't say, "Let me have a last date here." Make this your top priority so much so, here's his point, so much so that anything that hinders your pursuit of sanctification, anything that stands between you and Christ must be ruthlessly cut off and thrown away.

Look at Mark 8. We're just so used to having had the word of God watered down to us that we don't even realize the far-reaching consequences of what it says on its own terms. What a dangerous place for us to be. Mark 8:34, Jesus "summoned the crowd with His disciples," Mark 8:34, "and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'" The cross being an instrument of death and execution in that day. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." What is it that you want to hold onto more than Christ? Understand that that's the thing you should hate the most because it will be the instrument of your eternal damnation. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters, they'll either love the one, hate the other, vice versa." He said, "You can't serve God and mammon." You cannot serve Christ and your favorite sin. One of them has to go. That's how serious and profound this is.

So anything that stands between us and him must be ruthlessly cut off and thrown away. You stop one thing and you replace it with something else. Put off, put on. So let's just walk through some examples just to stimulate your thinking and we'll trust that the Spirit of God will draw us away from our carnality and into right spiritual thinking. A few examples. When your eyes are wrongly attracted to another person, physically turn your head away and pray, "Lord, keep my mind pure." If your computer is drawing you into sin, your iPad, whatever your personal device is, turn it off, move away from it, start doing something constructive. For some of you, take the radical thought of saying, "I'm going to get rid of all of it. I just can't handle it. It always leads me into sin." That's precisely what Jesus is saying. Cut it off. Do something so that that influence is gone so

that it can't pull you into it. You say, "But how would I get my work done?" I don't know. I don't know but I know what will happen to your soul if you don't. Don't trouble me with lesser questions if you're not concerned about the ultimate outcome of what happens to your soul. Why are we playing this game as if our window of time on earth was something to be compared of equality to what happens to you in eternity?

Let's go further. Let's get more personal. If you are in a relationship that is flirtatious, that is sensual, that is downright sinful, break it off today. Don't wait. Jesus says do it now, do it fast. And if you're married and you're in that condition, break off that situation and go out with your spouse and start rebuilding what you vowed at your wedding day that you would do anyway. It's about time that you kept your promise of fidelity, isn't it? Run from the compromising situation like Joseph did. Maybe you have to leave your job to seek righteousness. I don't know. You young people in here really speaking particularly inside the room here, knowing how conversations can go even in the church walls, but you young people and some of you are just going to have to do this individually, when the conversations start to turn coarse, start to get mean, start to get inappropriate, just walk away. Just walk away. You don't have to explain. You don't have to apologize. You don't have to say anything to them. Just get yourself out of the situation that is tempting you and drawing you into the course of sin. And better to live horizontally without friends than to live vertically without Christ, right? I mean, we have to start making some choices and not want to be identified with the world and identified with Christ. He doesn't take it like that. That's not discipleship. That's not being a Christian. That's being a hypocrite. And that kind of willingness, beloved, to deal dramatically with sin in your life, that exhibits the fruit of one who truly has eternal life. Romans 8:13 says, "if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Now look, I understand that for some of us it may require a long-term fight over years and even decades if you've developed long habits of sin that are deeply ingrained in your life, but you're commanded to deal with it. And if you're a Christian, you can, and if you're a Christian, you will. The wonder of this, the beauty of this for Christians is that we're not left to our own strength to do this. God has put his Holy Spirit in us and we have power through the Spirit to put these sins away. The Spirit not only gives us power to repent, gives us power to put the sins away, but he gives us the power to persevere in the midst of the struggle. What kind of world war would have been fought if the first time that there was resistance from the enemy, you know, we said, "Ah, this is too hard. I quit. The Nazi's can take over. You know, people died here, this is too hard. I quit." I walk away. No. No. No. No. No. No, unthinkable. Out on the suggestion. We fight wars because wars have principles at stake that are worth being vindicated and Christ is our highest principle, Christ is our highest purpose, and so we fight the battle for the glory of the one who redeemed us from sin and one day will deliver us from the very presence of sin. We do it to honor him. We do it because it's what he's called to. And if you're a Christian, it's what you want. I want to be free from sin. I struggle with it. Man, it clings to me but I want to be out of these clutches and so I'm going to fight whatever battle is necessary to be free from it and trust the Lord to give me the power to do so.

Well, if today has done anything for us, it would show us all how we would be utterly lost and utterly without hope if it weren't for the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to turn to a Psalm, Psalm 130. I'll be preaching on Psalm 130 this Tuesday, hint, hint. Psalm 130 gives us a proper perspective with which for you to leave today and to fall down before the Lord and to seek his mercy in your life. I am not going to sit here and wrap everything up and make it okay for everybody going out. I can't do that. I don't know your heart. I don't know if you're repentant or not. But I can offer scriptural hope to those of you who feel the weight of your sin and point you in a direction where you can approach the Lord with confidence even though you are stained with sin. Psalm 130 in verses 3 and 4 tell us, the first half here tells us the impact of God's moral law on us and what the reality is.

Psalm 130:3, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" Lord, if you held our sins against us, who could possibly survive? We're all guilty. We all fall short in our inner man, in our tongue and in our actions. We all fall short. Lord, if you were going to hold our sins against us without mercy, we'd all be lost. And yet there's this resounding note of hope, "But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." But God is a God of mercy. But God is a God of kindness and patience and love and kindness so that Scripture gives you your next step forward, recognize the undeserved mercy of God that is offered to sinners like you and go to him, go to him in light of the New Testament, in light of the Lord Jesus Christ who made a blood atonement for guilty sinners like you, and plead with him for mercy. Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner."

But beloved, don't play games. Don't play games. These are matters of earnest spiritual seeking. You may seek him, you will find him, he is willing to receive you and forgive you. You can seek him and find him but you must do so with all your heart.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, I thank You that You offer hope and forgiveness even to adulterers. I pray for each one here smitten by the law of God that they would take their burdened heart to the cross of Calvary, to the cross of Jesus Christ for cleansing, mercy, and forgiveness. May You turn this conviction into conversions and to repentant lives that show the mark of the true work of the Holy Spirit, not the counterfeit hypocrisy that so many are content to live in. Gracious God, I plead with You, gracious God, I plead with You, You know we've preached the 10 Commandments to expose sin to the hearts of people to make room for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ so that Your law would become the tutor that would lead us to Christ. Father, that's the pattern of Your word, that's the pattern of historic preaching. Won't You honor it? Won't You honor it with mercy upon poor, miserable sinners like those in this room and show us mercy? And Father, sanctify Your people from all of their sins. Help us to see the utter ugliness not only of this sin but of all sin that we might repent and that You might renew our hearts by the power of Your Holy Spirit that we stand complete in Christ being fully assured of the will and the love of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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