

Jesus on Lust
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Bible Text: Matthew 5:27-30
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We are so very glad that you're with us as we open God's word today. Our text this morning comes as we continue our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and our text this morning is chapter 5:27-30. I'm going to read that as we begin and I invite you to turn in your Bibles there with me. Matthew 5, beginning in verse 27 where our Lord said,

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. 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.

As you read this passage, you are struck by the great eternal weight that it brings to bear on things and how searching it is. First of all, it states that adultery is not simply a matter of the physical act but it is something that can take place in the mind. Adultery is something that can take place fully clothed and with no one knowing about it as God looks upon the thoughts and the intentions of your heart. You look at it and you see the reality of hell set before us, Jesus speaking to us, not a seeker friendly Gospel here, but warning all that hell is a reality and that there will be people thrown into it for their sins. We look at this and we realize that there is something dramatic going on; Jesus speaking to the urgency of the situation as he urges people to pluck out their eyes and to cut off their hands.

We'll see what he means by that in just a moment but as we come to this text, we come to something that is weighty, something of significance here. This is not a comedy hour. All of a sudden we realize that there are issues of great consequence that are in place. And as I've said many times, as you read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, you realize that Jesus is teaching for keeps. He is earnest. He is serious that these are matters of great import of which he speaks. So we come to God's word here today with a sense of reverence, with a sense of fear even, realizing that the weight of these matters are not to be trifled with. These are not things to disregard. These are not things to pass

over lightly. These are things that are intended to search us at our deepest level and to call forth a response that is worthy of the urgency of which Jesus speaks.

In this passage in Matthew 5:21 to 48, Jesus is illustrating something. He's illustrating the truth of what he said in Matthew 5:20. Look at that verse with me. Jesus said, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." So Jesus has set a standard and has called our attention to the fact that God requires righteousness from those who would enter into his presence. He does not simply fling the doors open and then everyone would come in regardless of their spiritual condition, regardless of whether they love Christ or not, regardless of whether they have appreciated the significance of sin or not. That's not true. That's a false Gospel. The Bible does not teach a universalism in which every man ends up in heaven at the end and no one goes to hell. This passage that we are dealing with here puts the end to that lie pretty quickly.

So Jesus says God requires righteousness from those who would enter into the kingdom of heaven and he says it must be a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. Well, what we have seen in days past as we have gone through our exposition of this, is that the scribes and Pharisees had a very external and ritualistic approach to righteousness. They thought that as long as man saw something that was outwardly pleasing, that they must be all right with God and they minimize the force of God's law to make it something that was purely external. What Jesus does, having stated that your righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, he goes on in verses 21 through 48 to give six different illustrations of what that means. We saw in the first six verses, verses 21 through 26, that he said that God not only condemns the physical act of murder, he also condemns the sin of anger even if it's not acted upon; that the one who would kill a man in his heart is as guilty as the act as the one who plunges the dagger into the heart. Here now beginning in verse 27, we see that Jesus is now searching the human heart with the true import of the law of God which says, "You shall not commit adultery."

We're going to break this text down into two primary parts if you want to take notes here this morning. We're going to see, first of all, that Jesus condemns the sin of lust and then in the second part of the message we'll see the cure that Jesus provides for lust. He condemns lust and also provides the cure for it, and we will start with the first point: Jesus condemns lust.

Now, before we go any further with this, let me step back, as it were, step back mentally if not physically from the pulpit as I say these things. We're entering into an area that obviously is intensely personal and we touch on things with this passage that would go for some to the deepest root of shame that is in your life as your knowledge of your private sin and the things that you have cherished in your heart is brought under the searching light of God's word, and we say these things with a gentle and tender spirit toward those whose hearts have been bruised by sin and offer the hope of the Gospel throughout the course of this message. So we speak with a tender heart as we come to these things, knowing that we live in such a perverse and sensual society that it is

impossible for people to walk through and not be affected by it. We recognize the depth of the problem that we're facing here in what we are addressing here.

At the same time, beloved, we need to say this: that while we recognize these things, while we recognize the pain in the hearts of those who have violated God's law in this way and feel the weight of that, while we realize that we live in an environment that stimulates this kind of sensual thinking incessantly, I mean, you can't even go through a supermarket aisle or drive down the road without seeing things that are pulling you into the very sin that Jesus condemns here, we recognize that and we speak with compassion toward sinners as we open this word here this morning. At the same time, beloved, we have to take God's word earnestly and we have to realize that even though it's painful, even though our environment is fallen and depraved and so perverse, even though that is true and we speak with a recognition of that, beloved, that does not give us, collectively or individually, that does not give us the prerogative to lower God's standard from what it actually is. We don't get to lower God's standard so that it doesn't cause us pain, we don't get to lower God's standard to accommodate it to the environment in which we live, and we don't get to lower God's standard to something that is attainable by our human efforts. No, Jesus here went out of his way to speak clearly about the sin of lust and to show how much God is opposed to it. So this word speaks not only to the young man in private but it also speaks to the one who self-righteously perhaps says, "I've never committed the physical act of adultery." This word comes and pops the bubble, it pops the balloon of self-righteousness when you realize how searching God's standard is, that there is no one who has perfectly met this standard anywhere in the universe with the exception of one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we must come to God's word today with humility. We come to it with a tender heart. We come to it to have God instruct us in his ways, to instruct us in what he requires because, look, it would be an absolute abandonment of pastoral responsibility to do anything less. What Christ says here in the context of lust is this: he says that lust is a sin that can lead people to eternal damnation. And to soften that, to make it so that it's something less than what God says it is, is not an act of compassion, it is an act of treason. It would be an act of treason to God to diminish his standard, and it would be an act of treason to you to make it something less than what Christ says that it is. It would be an act of treason to a pastoral responsibility to minimize this and to explain it all away and to excuse it in a way that you never come to grips with the weighty consequences of Jesus' words here. We need to understand with clarity that Jesus condemns lust in the heart and see what his way forward for us is in that.

So let's look at Matthew 5:27 a little more closely here. Our first point: Jesus condemns lust. You could ask the question: in God's eyes, who is an adulterer? In God's eyes, who is the one who violates marriage? And Jesus quotes the prevailing teaching at the time when he says in verse 27, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" Now, that's a direct quotation from Exodus 20:14. It's one of the 10 Commandments. And Jesus quotes that and sets it forth and it's obvious that the Pharisees whom he is refuting in this lengthy passage, had made this commandment known to their audience. We'll give them credit for that, but what they had done is that the Pharisees had

conveniently restricted the definition of adultery to the physical act of sexual sin and that, beloved, guts the law of God of its real force. Yes, Scripture says you shall not commit adultery in Exodus 20, but as we have pointed out in the past, we won't turn there today, as you read on in the 10 Commandments you find real quickly that the tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet and you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or anything that belongs to your neighbor," so that even in the 10 Commandments themselves it makes clear that God is commanding against sinful desires, not simply sinful actions. And the fact that your life might be externally in compliance with a bare regulation is no indication, it's not the final word we should say, let me restate that because that's important, the fact that you might be in external compliance with a command of God on the sin of adultery is no indication whatsoever that you have actually kept the commandment as God intends it.

Jesus goes on to say that in verse 28, that God's command against adultery goes very much further, and in words that search us all in verse 28 he says, "but I say to you." Notice that Jesus speaks from his own authority; that Jesus says, "I will interpret God's law for you and I will give you an inerrant, definitive explanation of what it means." He does this by right of the prerogative of being the Son of God that he can authoritatively interpret the law of God to the people of God and he says in verse 28, look at it with me, he says, "I say to you that everyone," no exceptions, "everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus here is contrasting his teaching with that which was promulgated by the Pharisees. The Pharisees would quote this commandment and speak about it in external terms to make it a standard that everyone could keep. Jesus takes that same commandment, interprets it and shows that it's a commandment that everyone has broken and so the outcome of the teaching is diametrically opposed.

And when Jesus says here "everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her," that word "looks" that he is using here is used with a verb tense that describes an ongoing look. It has the idea of someone who gazes with intent upon a woman in order to engage sexual desires in his mind. It's an ongoing look, not simply an inadvertent glance that says, "Oh, that woman is attractive or that man is handsome," and then moves on to something else. Some have described it in the past as the second look that says, "Oh, that person is attractive. Let me take another look and gaze on that and start to cultivate desires in my mind and to stimulate my imagination about what could be." Jesus says that look is the purposeful gaze of adultery. It's a gaze, it's a look, it's a concentrated focus that says, "I want to engage a sexual desire in my heart with what I'm doing with my eyes."

Now, last week we spoke about God's view on marriage and sexual sin, and if you weren't here to be able to hear that, I encourage you to pick up a copy of that CD because it really sets the context for what Jesus is talking about and why lust and adultery is such a grievous sin, why they are such grievous sins. What we said last time was is that marriage was a God-created ordinance in which a man and a woman would live together in a permanent, loving, intimate relationship with one another. God gave the institution of marriage to the human race, gave it to mankind for their blessing and for the propagation not only of families but that the sense of isolation that men and women have alone would

be addressed and would be helped. It was a gift from God that not only served to provide comfort and companionship to individual men and women in the relationship, but also that it would become a picture of the relationship that Christ has to his bride, the church. So we looked at all of that and we saw that there is a great high sanctity to the institution of marriage that God established even before the fall of man.

Now, as we have that in mind, we saw last time also that in order to protect the institution of marriage, to give a sense and to impose a reverence upon the institution, God's punishment for the sin of adultery in the Old Testament was the death penalty; that the man and woman caught in adultery would be stoned to death, and by the greatness of the penalty, you get a sense of the fearsome respect that is to be owed to the institution of marriage. We looked at all of that last time. I won't repeat it any further here.

Now, that all helps you understand the significance of what's at stake here. We are going to have two or three different streams of thought coming to form a large river that will impose and help us understand the significance of what Jesus is saying. Watch this: because, I'm going to give you about three causal clauses here, because marriage is a high institution given by God, because God protects it with the death penalty, because your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, because all of those things are true, now all of a sudden you have something of a perspective to understand why lust is such a serious sin. Because God requires worship from a pure heart, because God looks on the human heart and says, "How are you honoring me there in that place, in that sanctuary of worship in the inner man where I see?" because all of those things are true, we ask the question what is going on in a man's heart?

So when a man or a woman engages in these lustful looks, these lustful desires, the preoccupations of fantasy and imagination in their mind and in their heart, well then, beloved, what's going on when that happens? We have to not simply view that in isolation, we have to view that in connection with everything that God says about marriage. What does it say about a man or a woman who longs for the act of adultery, what is it saying about them and what is it saying about their heart? Well, 1 it's saying, "I want to violate the commandment of God here." It says, "I don't mind that in my inner man there is sin and I am defiling in the inner sanctuary of my heart the place where God created me to most worship him from my heart." Beloved, those lustful adulterous desires are an attack on the institution of marriage itself. God has said, "This institution shall be between one man and one woman, intimate within the bounds of that marriage commitment and respected by all," and a lustful desire says, "I will violate that. I will puncture that. I will bring that down. I will defile it in my heart." It's an act of treason against the institution of marriage. It's an act of treason against the law of God. So, despite what our culture conditions us to think, despite what virtually all marketing and advertising is designed to do as they stimulate your heart with lustful thoughts in order to make the connection with their product that you would want to buy, contrary to all of that, these things are not innocent. These are matters of weighty violation of the law of God.

So rightly do people from time to time ask in evangelistic encounters, "What makes you think you're going to heaven?" I'm a pretty good person. "Have you ever committed adultery?" No, never done that. I'm good enough. And yet the follow-up question becomes, "Have you ever looked on a woman to lust with your heart? Have you ever looked at a man, have you ever fantasized about a man that was not your husband in a way that was inappropriate?" Well, now that you put it like that. And you realize and you follow up and say, "You see, my friend, that is a violation of the law of God. You are not the innocent person that you think you are. You are guilty and condemned by the very word of God for the sin of lust that's in your heart." Jesus condemns it. He couldn't be more clear.

Look again at verse 28 lest we think that the pastor is over-interpreting it. Jesus says, "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." If you want a biblical illustration, we could put it this way: when King David in 2 Samuel 11 looked on Bathsheba and wanted her, he was already guilty of adultery from that lustful stare before they even brought her to him to consummate the act. He was on his roof, he saw her bathing, he had a desire that he did not mortify, and the adultery had already been committed before the act was consummated.

You see, beloved, here is the issue, here is where we need to come to grips with this matter: lust reveals the direction of your heart. Lust tells you what you are like. When you are a lustful person, when you are engaging in the sin of lust, that desire is holding a mirror up to you and saying this is what you are really like, no matter what any other man or woman thinks about you. This is how God sees you and what God sees in a lustful heart is a heart that desires to violate his commandment against adultery, that wants to violate his institution of marriage, and wants to engage in that even if physically you're not able to consummate the act. And beloved, here's the sad reality of it, and I say this with sympathy and with sorrow for all of you knowing that this is a common issue: instead of a pure vessel where God is to be worshiped, your heart instead has become a perverse center of seeking what God has forbidden. Let that sink in.

Who are you? Well, we're more than just what we do in our external man, we're more than simply our physical human flesh, aren't we? There is a visible, tangible component to our existence in our flesh and there is an invisible spirit, there is an invisible aspect, there is an immaterial aspect to man. The material and the immaterial aspect of man. And it's more than the material man that matters to God, God looks at the heart and says, "What goes on there?" And what Christ says is that when adultery, when fornication is going on in the heart, that is what God sees. That is how God views the man or the woman and the guilt before God is so great that it calls forth eternal judgment. These are matters of great import, aren't they? Why is the desire alone such a guilty act? It's a heartfelt assault on the order of God. It's a heartfelt assault on his holiness. It says, "From my heart I desire everything that God has forbidden and prescribed." That's why it is such a serious sin.

Now, when you state the standard like that, beloved, you realize that God's standard is far higher than anything the Pharisees ever dreamed about. The Pharisees said as long as you're physically pure, you're okay. Jesus comes and says, "No, that's not the case. That's a lie, and we need to go to the issue of your heart." You see, God requires a heart virtue, not simply external compliance, and so what is going on in your heart and in your thoughts and in your desires matters before God and, beloved, state it this way, you are accountable to God for them. And as we are working out the implications of this, the implications are enormous and, beloved, they go beyond men. This is more than just a problem or an issue for men.

Listen to what Arthur Pink said about this in a very searching passage from his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. I'll read it slowly to give it time to sink in because this also goes to the issue of what our culture is like and how we need to be so separate from it. He said this and I quote, "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." He goes on to say, "How great, then, must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses," ladies, "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."

You see, God establishes this realm of purity and it's not simply a man's desire that violates it, it's the woman who invites the man to lust in that manner, who goes out of her way to call attention to herself with the physical beauty that God has given to her and says, "I'll put it on display." And for those of us that are parents, we have a responsibility to teach and to train our children not to live that way, not to be carnal and sensual even in the way they present themselves. That is because Jesus condemns the sin of lust and to entice others into that sin is as guilty as committing the sin itself. So we realize that the implications of this go absolutely everywhere and well might the sun in darkness hide itself, well might we hang our head in shame as we realize God's word convicts us in this way.

Now, beloved, we are at a really important pivot point in what I'm teaching here this morning and what Jesus is saying. We are at a crucial pivot point for what I'm about to say. This all is convicting, isn't it, and it sounds very strict and it is strict. God means what he says and Jesus teaches for keeps. And here's the deal, this goes beyond today's message. Right now you're at a pivot point for how you will respond to the word of God. If that sounds strict and convicting, beloved, I beg you, don't resist it, don't reject it, don't put your fingers in your ears on that account. When the doctor comes and tells you, "I'm sorry to tell you this but you have terminal cancer," the doctor is not hurting you when he says that, the doctor is not violating your sense of well-being with that, he's simply telling you the truth. Well, when God's word convicts us and in a room of this size there is just bound to be a number of people who want to respond this way, who says, "I don't care. I'm not listening. I don't care. I'm not going to take this seriously." I mean, this is the nature of pastoral ministry to have people respond to God's word in that way, to say, you can see it happening in their hearts and in their lives, "This is starting to convict me. I'm

out of here." Rather than running away from it or ignoring it or hardening and stiffening your neck against it is not the way to your spiritual blessing. That's not good. Why would you do that? In fact, to harden your heart against Jesus' teaching here only multiplies your guilt, only multiplies the sinfulness of your heart to say, "Not only have I heard what Christ says, I reject it so that I can continue on, either to justify myself or because I don't want to change."

You see, when we say Jesus condemns lust, we realize we are making a very far-reaching statement that is right there on the surface of Scripture to be made and then the question becomes, "So what are you going to do with that?" And beloved, I beg you to soften your heart. I beg you to humble yourself before God and say, "God, now that you have convicted me, I will not run. Instead I ask you what must I do now? What must I do?" For some, "What must I do to be saved? Because I realize that my whole heart, the whole orientation of my life has been engulfed in this sin and I haven't even rejected it, resisted it or hated it. I like it that way, but now I see that Jesus says this is a lust that will carry me all the way to hell. What do I do?"

So if all of this sounds strict, beloved, don't resist it. Just at this point in your life, my brother and my sister in Christ, my friend who may be visiting here for the first time and you're hearing things that sound different to your ears, just do this one little thing at this point in the message: just take the message of Christ seriously. Take it earnestly. Receive it as someone who needs to learn, who needs to hear, who has to give an ear to this, to realize that when Jesus Christ speaks in his word, he speaks with authority over your soul. It is his prerogative to speak this way to us. It's the prerogative of the Creator to speak to the creature and say, "This is what I require." So we need to take it seriously and what motivates you to do so, what gives you the strength to lend an ear to that which convicts you of guilt is this: it is the certain knowledge that Jesus Christ intends your good in what he says. Christ intends good for us when he convicts us in this way. Christ intends to bless us, to bring us out of the muck, to bring us out of the danger of judgment, to deliver us just as the physician who says, "You have cancer but I have a cure for that which ails you."

Well, Jesus does that in that same approach as we continue on in the passage and come to our second point this morning which is: Jesus' cure for lust. His cure for lust. We saw that he condemns it, but in the gracious nature of his wonderful saving person, he doesn't leave us there. Jesus has exposed the standard, he has defined what the standard of God is recognizing, obviously in his omniscience that that's going to create great conviction of guilt, now Jesus explains how to deal with that sin. How is it that you deal with the sin of lust? And for that we go back to our text and look at verse 29. In verse 29, Jesus 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." Verse 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."

Now, there are some really important aspects of grammar here that I want to point out to you that will make you get the force of what Jesus is saying and clarify exactly what he is talking about here. First of all, when he says "if your eye makes you stumble," here he's using the singular "you." He's not speaking broadly and generally. He uses a singular "you" in the grammar in order to make the application direct and personal. You should have the sense that Christ is speaking directly to me here as I read this part. That's the import of the grammar that he is using there. He's speaking to you, not to the crowd at large.

Now, in another way that makes the application of this immediate and helpful to us, when you look at verse 29, look at it with me again, he says, "If your right eye makes you stumble," and here he uses a verbal form that has the idea that this is something that is an ongoing challenge for you, this is a repeated sin for you, this is something that as an ongoing matter causes you as a pattern to stumble in the sense that it's like the idea of setting a trap and you go and you step in the trap and it clangs up and it has you and it punctures you with its sharp metal teeth. Jesus is identifying that thing in your life which often leads you into temptation and sin, if it causes you to stumble as a matter of an ongoing pattern of your life. It's probably not that hard for any of us, any of you to say, "Oh, yeah, I know where that would fit in my life." It might be different from the person sitting next to you but where it fits in your life and the question is what do you do with that? What do you do? How do you overcome that? Well, we've got to be fair to the text while still being discrete with a mixed audience. Jesus is talking about the issue of sexual sin and the question is is there something that causes you to stumble in that way?

Now, a lot of people, not everyone but a lot of people would come to a young man and say, "I know what you need," and they make promises that they're never going to be able to keep but they tell a young man, "Here's what you need. First of all, you need an accountability partner. You need a man who is going to hold you accountable so go and find one." They'll say, "And you need, also you need to have some software on your computer that will generate a report to your accountability partner in order to keep you accountable." Well, I'm not going to stand here and condemn that but I am going to tell you that's not where the battle lies and that's not how you're going to win the battle. Listen, beloved, let's just be really candid and put it all out on the table, won't we? Those things are just an excuse to avoid dealing with the heart sin of the nature of things. If you don't fear God enough to deal with sin, do you think that you're going to fear a man enough to deal with sin? The whole problem with sin the Bible says very plainly, the fear of God leads one to forsake evil. Well, the reason that you're sinning in part, in large part is because you do not have an appropriate fear of God and injecting a fear of man into that and then what's the man going to do? "Oh, shame on you. I saw that you did this." A fear of man is not a substitute for the motivating fear of God in your life. You can set those things up but it's not going to solve anything in your heart.

You know, and besides, you know, look, we've all been around and a lot of you are a lot smarter in technological things than I am. Everybody knows that there are ways to get around even the most strict versions of computer monitoring software. You just go and get another device or the guys that are really smart find out ways to circumvent it. An

external factor like that will not change your heart and the truth be told, for those of you that weren't here a few weeks ago, I said I didn't care what time it was and I threw my watch under the piano in order to make the point that I was just going to say what I had to say. Beloved, it's fine to have an accountability partner if you want to have an accountability partner. That's not my point but let's be honest with what these relationships often devolve into, it simply becomes a means of saying, "I'm not struggling but I have an accountability partner," as if that excused the ongoing indulgence in the sin, "But I've got an accountability partner." That's not the answer. You have to take responsibility for the condition of your own heart and maybe a man can help you with that, sure enough, but that is not the ultimate conclusion. That is not what is going to solve it because the problem is inside you and a man outside you can't help you with the inner desires of your heart. It's more desperate than that and you fight a spiritual war with the squirt guns of human measures and then people wonder, "Why am I still in the same place now six months or a year later?"

What does Jesus say about it? Look at verse 29, he says, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you." These verbs, "tear it out, throw it from you," different verb tense in the original language. It conveys the sense of urgency, that this requires immediate action. "Do it now!" is the idea. And what Jesus is saying, when you realize, when it comes to your mind that you have this thing that becomes an occasion for temptation and sin in your life, what do you do with it? It isn't that hard, get rid of it. Get rid of it. And Jesus here is not commanding self-mutilation, he's using hyperbole. He's not saying literally cut off your hand or literally pluck out your eyes. Do you know what that's going to do? It's going to leave you an amputee but it's still going to leave you with your sinful heart if you simply take it that way. Cutting off your hand isn't going to deal with the fact that you have a sinful inner man.

So we get beyond that childish, literal, wooden interpretation to see what Jesus is talking about here. What he's saying is this is so serious that you would get rid of something that has the value of your eye or your hand. If it's making you stumble, get rid of it. Throw it away. Act on this rather than tolerating it and excusing it, is the point. You see, beloved, your willingness to forsake it is a measure of your desire for righteousness. Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." And what Jesus is saying here is that there should be no limits on what you are willing to forsake or what you are willing to do if it would advance your efforts to grow in righteousness, and if you're not willing to forsake the thing that is dearest and closest to you, then you need to reevaluate your entire approach to what you think is Christianity.

"Jesus is," quoting here from a commentator, "Jesus is speaking of what we call spiritual mortification. Anything that stands between us and him must be ruthlessly torn out and thrown away. Drastic measures are always appropriate to protect one's spiritual health." Tear it out! Throw it from you! If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you! This is urgent! And the willingness to rationalize, the willingness to accommodate your sin is lethal in this area. And realize what's at stake as you minimize Jesus' teaching and you rationalize and keep that which you love, your treasured pet sin,

realize what's at stake here. Jesus says, "It would be better to get rid of that than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

Jesus is impressing upon us through the verb tense, "Cut it off! Throw it out! Get rid of it! Do it now!" The urgency of the matter and through the recognition that heaven and hell are at stake here. You must repent of these things because if you won't say, I saw this quote this morning as I was looking at something just on my way out the door almost, if you won't say goodbye to your sins in this life, your sins will say goodbye to you in hell where you will just face the punishment of them, not the temporary enjoyment of them. And because that's at stake, then beloved, do it now. Take action immediately. Let this bring you to a sense of urgency about the matter. Wake up from your slumber and deal with your spiritual life. To say it gently and tenderly, even though I elevate my voice. If I didn't elevate my voice, if I didn't do something to communicate urgency, who would take me seriously? "It must not be that important because he's not that worked up about it." Well, yeah, we're worked up about it, heaven and hell are at stake here. Jesus says, "Do it now! Take action immediately!"

Now, we're going to work up to a Gospel conclusion here speaking to those of you that are in Christ but struggling with this common and besetting sin. What does, "Take action immediately," look like? When your eyes start to fix, you turn away your eyes and say, "Lord, keep my mind pure." You forcibly turn yourself away, "Lord, I can't go there." That's the kind of urgency of which Jesus speaks. Turn off your computer. Get up and walk away from it and do something else. Do it now rather than sitting there and engaging it and letting it suck you into more and more in the dark recesses of the internet. For some of you, break off the sinful relationship today. Walk out of this service and make the phone call and say, "This is over. What we have been doing is wrong and it must stop and it has to stop today. I'm sorry. Goodbye." Deal with it urgently. Cut it off if you're in a relationship that brings you into sin. If you're friends with other people of your peers and they are just cultivating your mind and diminishing Christ and making sin look attractive to you, get out. It would be better for you to go to heaven alone than to go to hell with your friends, wouldn't it? Run away from the compromising situation just like Joseph did.

You see, beloved, those are just illustrations. The world indulges these things. The man of Christ runs from them, cuts them off and says, "No, I declare war against this." You see, the true Christian sees sin and sees lust as an enemy to be destroyed, not a friend to be accommodated, not a strange relative to make excuses for. The mindset of your head must be that my unholy desires must be obliterated, not indulged. And if a text like this brings you to the recognition that not only have I not resisted sin, I've loved it, I have pursued it and this is what I love and like, beloved, what that is showing you is that you're not a Christian and it doesn't matter whether you've walked an aisle or said a prayer when you were three years old at your mother's knee. If your heart hasn't been changed to know something about the hatred of sin, there is no reason for you to think that you're a Christian and that means that you need to come to Christ in the first instance. And after all of your sin and after all that you've done in the ways that you disregarded him and in all of your hard heartedness, Christ still patiently stands and

presents himself and says, "Come to me and I will save you from all of your sin." He freely invites you to salvation and you come with a sense not simply, "Jesus, don't let me go to hell," you come with a sense that says, "Jesus, deliver me from sin."

Now, a text like this, a message like this calls for some extended words of pastoral help and that's what I want to pivot to now. Jesus has been as clear as he can be. Lust is a sin that God condemns. If you have this in your life, if you are dealing with issues in your life, get rid of whatever prompts it. And now the question is: where do we go from here? Well, collectively as a church, we need to be sympathetic and prayerful for our young people who are engaging these battles. They are in a fight of their lives, aren't they, in a world that wants to bring them down. So we don't adopt a spirit of self-righteousness and condemnation toward our young people. We want to pray for them. We want to encourage them. We want to help them. You also need to know where to find the source of victory. As I've said, it's not in accountability partners. The most searching computer software isn't going to change the fiber of your heart. It's too easy to lie to men. It's too easy to circumvent technology. We have to look elsewhere for help and it starts with you hating sin enough to kill it, not simply to manage it. Not simply to manage it through the software, to kill it.

And how do we go about that? Well, beloved, this is a spiritual battle and you fight it with spiritual weapons. First of all, you must understand that you need the word of God in your life. You need the word of God. You need Scripture. You need the Bible. You need to be one who is reading and engaging the Bible with your eyes and your mind. Why? I'll tell you why: because what informs your mind eventually over time shapes your desires. If you are feeding your mind with the holiness of God's word, in time it will shape your desires to be more conformed to that.

Look over at Proverbs 6, for example, in verse 20. King Solomon said to his son and points him to the word. He said, "My son, observe the commandment of your father And do not forsake the teaching of your mother; Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck." Have it with you wherever you go. "When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you; And when you awake, they will talk to you. For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light; And reproofs for discipline are the way of life To," here's the purpose, "To keep you from the evil woman, From the smooth tongue of the adulteress." You see, when you fear God and when his word is informing your mind again and again, you start to see through the external allure of the temptation and say, "That is actually the enemy of my soul. I'll flee back to Christ once more." But only the word of God can do that for you. Only the word of God can elevate your mind and change your heart in that manner. So you need the word.

Secondly, I realize that you also need something to encourage you and to help you, and in this we realize that we are looking beyond ourselves and we're looking to Christ himself. We're looking to the sympathy that Christ has on sinners.

Look over at Hebrews 4. This particularly for the young Christian man, the young Christian woman who feels the weight of unholy desires and wrestles against them and gets discouraged with the fact that this doesn't seem to go away; that the fight is often intense and discouraging; and that you have taken a few shots on the battlefield, so to speak. Well, beloved, when you're feeling that weight of defeat, remember who your Christ is. Remember that he came to be the friend of sinners. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. And in verse 15 of Hebrews 4 it says, "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Do you realize what that's saying, my Christian brother? Do you realize what that's saying to you in your time of discouragement? You say, "This has overwhelmed me!" To which Christ says he understands. "I don't know where to turn to!" To which Christ says, "Come to me for grace to find help." There is help, it's you finding it at the feet of Christ, in humility going before him and saying, "This has overwhelmed me! I need your grace! I need your help!" and knowing based on the authoritative word of God that Christ hears that prayer with sympathy and does not send away the beggar who comes to him for help.

Look over at Matthew 6. We can tie this directly into the Sermon on the Mount, and this is something that I find very encouraging, that Jesus after having laid forth these strict words about lust, in the same message later on invites us to pray in this way, invites you to pray in this way. Look at Matthew 6:12, actually look at verse 11 where he says, "Give us this day our daily bread." That's important here, contemplating a daily prayer, a daily approach to prayer, a daily spirit of prayer that says, verse 12, "And forgive us our debts." God, forgive me. I have sinned against you. Christ invites you, nay, Christ commands you to pray this way, commands you to seek grace, to seek forgiveness from the throne of grace. Why would he do that except that he intends to supply it, to wash you, to forgive you, to cleanse you, to fulfill his promise that says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." To realize that there is cleansing and reconciliation available at the throne of grace when you seek it from Christ, and to realize that his love has not changed for you, that his saving intentions for you have not changed, and to let that encourage you to seek him knowing that he paid the price for all your sin at Calvary. And then as you are at that throne of grace seeking not only forgiveness, look at the prayer so pertinent to our topic this morning in verse 13, "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Here's where the hard work of spiritual life and the mortification of sin takes place.

You see, and I talk with young men about this kind of stuff, everybody wants the silver bullet that makes it go away today and never to come back again. Everybody wants immediate deliverance. Well, do you know where your deliverance in that sense is going to come from? Do you know where that is going to happen? It's in heaven. It's in heaven that we are fully delivered from all of our sinful desires and the struggle with sin. It's in heaven that we are delivered from that. Don't expect it here on earth. There is this daily seeking of grace that is at the core of the sanctification that you desire, saying, "God, I have sinned against you. Today, please forgive me. God, today I ask you to lead me not into temptation but to deliver me from evil." You see, part of the reasons that God lets

you struggle as a Christian with your sinful desires and temptations is to teach you to humble yourself before him, to learn not to trust in yourself, and to day by day rely upon his grace, and in that daily repetitive reliance Christ will conform you to his image over time. But there is no single prayer. You don't come to Christ with a crisis mentality that says, "Oh," and then it's all changed forever and ever, amen.

Paul said as a mature Christian in Romans 7, he said, "The things I want to do, I don't do. The things I do, I don't want to do." He knew something about the inner struggle of sin whatever his issue was. He knew something about the struggle of sin even as a mature apostle in Romans 7. And there does come a point where you despair of self and as Paul said, "Wretched man that I am!" To which the response is, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that he has delivered me from sin, that Christ has paid the price for my sin, that he views me graciously, that he gives day by day power to live to his glory." But, beloved, don't expect to win the war in a single day as if this is never going to come up again. Commit to victory over the long haul and walk faithfully with Christ day by day using the means that he has supplied: his word, daily prayer, and his gracious forgiving disposition toward you that says, "Even in the midst of this battle, my Christ accepts me and has paid the price for all of my sin with his shed blood at Calvary." That's how you avoid despair in the midst of it, even as Christ says, you go and you get rid of whatever it is that causes you to stumble.

You're not alone in the battle, my brother, my sister in Christ. Christ is with us to help us, to forgive us, to equip us, to carry us. And that ultimately, think about it this way, it could be no other way, what is Jesus' cure for lust? Ultimately it's himself. It's coming to him and relying on him and depending on him and following him in the midst of the battle. And beloved, you will find that Christ is faithful in the end.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we come before you and we pray for the men and women, the boys and girls, that are under the sound of our voice here today. We know, O God, that the way of this struggle is often hard and it is often laced with a lot of failure. We ask you to have mercy on those who are yours, to pick them up, to strengthen them, to renew them in hope, looking to the cross where all of sin was paid for, looking to Christ who never sinned in any way, and that we have a representative, a brother in heaven, who has fulfilled all of this to perfection, never failing once, and we lean on him to represent us before you. And Father, in that we find great comfort and strength. Father, some need to be convicted that they are not Christians. We would not minimize or mitigate that. May the reality of what your word requires help them see how far short they fall so that they would cry out for a Savior. And Father, as we go through life together corporately as a church, Father, help us ever to be gracious, ever to be sympathetic, ever to be prayerful for those in our midst. Father, enduring struggles that they haven't articulated to anyone. But, Father, we are all in the flesh. We are all falling short in one way or another, and so let that recognition cause us to view one another with kindness, with gentleness, with faithfulness, bringing one another before the throne of grace, praying for one another, and as we do that, O God, may we see your hand at work sanctifying us, sanctifying a

people in our midst, Father, distinct from the world, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh in such a way, Father, that our supreme affection is on Christ, not our flesh, and we desire to please him more than we desire to please ourselves. Lead us forward from this day on, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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