

## Matt 5:27-30

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘*You shall not commit adultery.*’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

This morning I hope to accomplish 3 things.

**First** I want to clear up some confusion **I have had** and may have **passed on to you**.

**Second**, I want to talk a little more about Coveting.

**Third**, I would like to finish our text about Adultery.

So for the **confusion**.

On July 4 I said that I believed the word “brother” in our text was not restricted to being used for fellow believers. I believed it was referring to fellow humans.

My reasons were that murder is not a crime that is limited to fellow believers. If I kill someone who is not a believer, it is still murder. So getting on the murder train for a believer or non believer would both be wrong.

Second the people in Jesus’s audience, his disciples included, would have most likely taken the word brother as applying to fellow Jews. In their frame of reference they probably would not have applied it to only followers of Christ. There are lots of examples where, even after Christ’s resurrection the disciples used the word “brother in just that way.

So it made a lot of sense to me and there were many that agreed with that interpretation.

**I said that I was going to apply what Jesus says about murder with assumption that He is not limiting what He is saying to transactions with just believers. I said that if I am wrong about the assumption it would change the application dramatically.**

That is what I said and thought. I said that the word for Brother was not restricted to believers.

Then a week later I began applying what we should do when we **approach the alter** and remember someone has **something against us**. I realized after

reviewing that sermon (early on the Sunday morning on which I was scheduled to **give** that sermon) that I applied these instructions to only fellow believers. And that was different than I had previously defined brother. I restricted the application of the **reconciliation of brothers to believers**. I talked to Carla about that problem on the way to church that week. Then the same topic came up in Sunday School and I knew I had to restudy this and rethink it.

I had to re-ask the question- How are we to understand and apply the word brother in Christ's sermon on the mount?

I still believe that when the disciples and the crowd **heard** the word "**brothers**", they would have regarded the word brother as referring to fellow Israelites. In their minds that concept would have included a **mix of people** who were **zealous** with those who were **uncommitted** to obeying and trusting God. The sermon happened early enough in Jesus's ministry that the disciples probably would not have had a firm grasp on who were **in** the kingdom and who were **not**. So I think I was right about that as far as it went. And I think we **are** guilty of murder whether we kill a believer or a non believer. And it makes sense that hatred of either kind of person would be evil, because it is on the murder train. This all makes sense to me.

But when I think about someone putting their gift on the alter to seek out some **unbeliever** to reconcile their relationship with, I do not see much of that in the epistles. In fact, most of the focus toward unbelievers is not to get them to reconcile **with us**. Most of the focus is for them to reconcile **with God**. That is our big push.

The relationships that matter most are **inside** the body, not **outside**.

That is clear with even a cursory reading of the New Testament. Body life is precious.

OK then. Then how do we determine if Jesus is talking about "**Israelite**" **brothers** or "**believer in Christ**" **brothers**? Normally you go by what the **audience** would understand **when Christ says it**. But I don't think that fits here. I think Jesus was talking about a dynamic that they had not yet experienced. So they didn't have the capacity to put the word "**brother**" into the framework that Christ was speaking about.

**So where do we go** to understand this?

Well let's first expand the context to the whole sermon on the mount.

Verses 22-24 uses the word Brother 4 times. The emphasis is that we should not **hate our brother** or degrade him in any way. Then we are to seek **reconciliation** with our brother whenever it is in our power.

**Matt 7:3-5** tells us to **avoid hypocrisy** when dealing with the sins of others. We are never coming from a position of superiority. We all have sins and until we are engaged with our own we are not qualified to help someone else with theirs.

But all of this sounds eerily familiar of how the **epistles** tell believers to treat **each other**. Non believers would not have the capacity to deal with individual sins. For us to try to help those under "**slavery to sin**" to stop doing a **single sin** would be futile. It would accomplish nothing.

Then we look at something Jesus said later in His ministry that sheds some important light.

**Matthew 12:50 (NKJV)**

**<sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."**

Jesus is defining brotherhood based on faith, based on the obedience that comes by faith.

Then Jesus uses the word brother again in

**Matthew 18:15-20 (NKJV)**

**15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.**

**16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'**

**17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.**

**18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

**19 Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.**

**20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."**

Again, what would it matter if we fixed fellowship with a human that we have no fellowship with, really? The goal here seems to be to restore fellowship in the family. And if it escalates, it is clear what to do. Take it eventually to the membership of the **church**. He uses the word commonly used for church.

Obviously there would be no reason to take a matter that is **outside** of the church **to** the church. The church would have no authority. The matter must

be an **internal** matter. And in context Jesus is speaking about the same kind of thing in Matt 5 and Matt 18.

So with just this context I think we see that, no matter how the hearers heard Christ sitting on that hillside, it looks like Christ was using the word differently than they all would have understood it at the time. To me, Matthew 18 is conclusive in showing that when **Jesus says brother** He is talking about what would eventually be a **fellow believer** inside a church fellowship.

But there is **another tool** in our tool box that is also helpful. Most of what was taught in **the Epistles** was simply restatements of Christ's teachings. The more we study the sermon on the mount, the more we catch seeds of what Christ was saying in **all** the epistles that followed.

The most revealing question is this. How did the **disciples TEACH** what they learned from Christ?

How did **they apply** what Christ said about hate, what Christ said about adultery, what Christ taught about reconciliation?

## JUDGING

Here is just one example of how Paul applied Jesus teaching about judging sins. We just saw what Jesus said about dealing with the sins of others that he called brothers. Now look at what Paul says about dealing with the sins of others. Look at the difference he makes between those **inside** the church and those **outside**.

### **1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.**

**<sup>10</sup> Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.**

**<sup>11</sup> But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person.**

**<sup>12</sup> For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?**

**<sup>13</sup> But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "*put away from yourselves the evil person.*"**

We don't see any need or reason to chase a non believer to straighten him out and get him to stop sinning. Our job with them is to call them to be **reconciled to God**. It is very clear that Paul limited Jesus teaching of "brother" to those inside the church.

We could go on with anger and murder. There are lots of instances of the apostles applying Jesus' teaching. But I don't think we need to go further. When the apostles applied what Christ said about brothers, they applied it as if Christ were talking about **fellow believers**. So I was wrong about that and I think I have laid out enough evidence to prove it.

Now I think that there **are** other places in scripture where we are told to love our **enemies** and our **neighbors**, not just our brothers. So I think the application I made is true that we **cannot live in hatred of non believers** or write them off due to their stupidity or wickedness. We still hold out hope for them. We still hold out an openness and readiness to present them with the Gospel. But I believe that the text on hatred may not have had that as its **primary** application. Christ is primarily describing Kingdom life. OK, with that settled I think we can move on.

Now about adultery and coveting.

I noticed while studying that **Adultery** and **sexual immorality** and **coveting** are often joined in the same context.

**Heb 13:4-6** has it combined

So does **2 Peter 2:12-14**

I placed a link of one of Mike's sermons on facebook and encouraged everyone to listen to it. I did that largely because of how firmly Mike made the connection between **coveting** and **sexual sin**.

The text was this.

**Ephesians 5:3-5 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> **But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;**

<sup>4</sup> **neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.**

<sup>5</sup> **For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

Remember last week when I told you that I believe Jesus was simply applying the **coveting command** to the **adultery command** in the 10 commandments. Remember I said that Jesus was not **changing the topic** from adultery to all sexual immorality. After studying this week I am even more convinced of that.

Adultery, fornication and sexual craziness finds its source in covetousness. What is coveting? Coveting is allowing one's self to **strongly keep wanting** that which cannot be obtained by a faithful and obedient plan. It is allowing yourself to keep wanting something you **don't have** and currently **can't have**. It is like the child's look after you tell the child "You cannot have that candy". **Strong desire is not** the root problem. We can faithfully re-channel all the strong desires that God gives us. We can always be faithful in the face of **strong desires**.

But the problem of covetousness is that we say **NO** to the re-channeling. We allow ourselves to **fixate** on that which is not ours to have. In our adultery text, the fixation is on our **neighbor's wife**. But it can be anything. Remember that we talked about this in Isaiah when we talked about idolatry. Coveting is actually idolatry.

All of us who are married have one thing in common. We married a really flawed person. And it is terribly easy to fixate on that which **we do not have**. And we can easily think that in order for me to be happy **she or he** needs to **be** this and that and **do** this and that. And don't we have rock solid reasons for our self created misery? So we refuse to be happy until we get what we want.

But have you ever noticed we are much slower to consider just how much the person who married **us** married a **really flawed person**? And what happens when **they** fail to re-channel **their** desires? What happens when **they** won't let go of that which **we should be** or **should do**? Yeah. We see the wars described in the book of James. Oh, we rarely blame **ourselves** for that. We see ourselves as the victims. But often we are blinded by our own selfishness and covetousness. We have fixated on something we want that we cannot have by faith.

And what is the remedy?

### **giving of thanks**

You might think, C'mon. You must be kidding. You must have no clue. How can I give thanks for the situation **I** am in? How can I give thanks for **THAT** person with all those flaws and all of their failures in meeting **my** needs? Well, I don't know, but God says that is the solution, so I guess we better get to work figuring out how.

Ruth has been talking of late about how well she can see from her "extreme old age" what God did **from her youth**. She talks about how even all the **painful** things and **difficult** things were preparing her to face situations that were in her future. Well that is the kind of thanksgiving we are talking about. We are to be thanking God that **He knows what we need**. And even though

we can't see how something painful in our lives would meet any kind of need, God knows it does. Maybe what we need more than anything else is to have our attentions **redirected to Him**. Maybe that would have never happened without the pain and loss. Maybe what we need more than anything else is for that which we have **dreamed of** to be **shattered**. We **do not know**. And we do not **need to know**. But we do know that God is shaping our lives, event by event, to accomplish **His goals** in our lives. And that will be good. In fact it will be worth every tear. So we are logically free to **sanely** thank God **for** everything and **in** everything.

Now when you are busy thanking God for that which **you have**, how likely are you to become the spoiled child fixated on that which you **cannot have**? Thanks is truly the answer for pornography, for coveting a neighbors wife or a neighbors donkey or a neighbor's anything. **God has given me what He wants me to have**. Maybe that should go on our refrigerator this month. God has given me what He wants me to have. Praise His name.

OK now, what about the rest of our text?

**29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.**

I think there is a serious question we need to ask about this text.

**Is this primarily a believer's normal method of fighting sin? Or is it a display of just how seriously we should take sin? Or both?**

Now, what do you know about yourself and sin?

If you are powerfully drawn to a sin and you lost half of your capacity to access it, what would you do?

You would use the other half.

That is us.

Now if cutting out your right eye would free you of that sin, you would be better off without that eye.

And if cutting off your right hand would free you of that sin, you would be better off without that right hand.

The Jewish audience would have regarded the right eye and the right hand as crucial to one's existence. It is not just any eye or hand. It is the dominant one. It is the superior one.

Maybe they were like us. Maybe they just didn't get how **bad sin really is**. We think, oh, God will forgive it. He doesn't mind. It is ok. I never said I was a perfect person. He knows how bad I want this. He knows how hard this is to say no to.

Nope. He says **losing your hand** or **eye** would be **worth** not committing the next sin you are tempted to do.

Do we really believe that?

Have you ever thought this thought? You are thinking about **doing something** you know is a sin, or **not doing something** when **not doing it** is a sin. You are thinking about this. And you conclude, what is the harm. If I do this sin, surely I can confess it and it will be forgiven.

Now look at what Jesus says. This is **His way** of approaching the temptation. I am thinking about doing this sinful thing. Well it would be better that I **cut off a hand** or **gouge out an eye** than to do that sin I am tempted to do.

What does this emphasize immediately to us? The **seriousness** of sin. It is **deadly** serious. If our theology causes us to go soft on our own sinful choices, it is not good theology. If our theology causes us to think that our sinful choices pose no eternal danger, we do not believe the teaching of Jesus.

Sinful choices were **deadly serious** to Christ and He taught that **we should** take them deadly serious as well.

Think about it. Those seemingly little choices we are faced with are all the things that put Christ on the cross. And if you want to see the real nature of sin, if you want to know the **real stark harshness** of the sin that you feel tempted to commit, look at Christ on the cross. That is where our **little** sins are revealed in all their **horror and ugliness**.

Now none of Jesus's disciples ever prescribed cutting off organs to fight sin. So that is a pretty good indication that Jesus was not suggesting this is how you normally go about fighting sin. We are told lots of efforts we should take. And we are told to make no provision for sin.

What sin do we do daily battle with? Is there a costly method available to us to eliminate that sin, even if it costs us stuff we really like? This is saying that cost would be a **small cost** to pay. Do **anything** you **can do** that will be effective to stop sinning.

It is far far better to suffer even the loss of a **valuable body part** in the present than to suffer hell's torture for eternity. Even if we do not take what Jesus said as a literal method for fighting sin in most cases, even if we believe our primary method of fighting sin is to renew our minds to overcome sin, we have got to grasp the seriousness of what He is saying.



Jesus uses a **gross** image to show how **gross sin is** in His sight. How horrible would it be to gouge out your eye? Well that is how gross the next sin you knowingly choose to commit is.

Look how pragmatically Jesus looks at this too. He is telling us, do what is profitable. Do what is best for you. And losing limbs and eyes is better for you than sinning.

Jesus in another place told us that if we do not hate our fathers and mothers and wives and children and even our own lives we cannot be a disciple of Christ. Luke 14:26. This is similar language to what we are dealing with this morning. If any of these things get in your way, choose Christ. He must be first. This was not to say that Christian obedience is one of hating our families. We are commanded to even **love our enemies**. But Christ was using this language to show the superiority of our rightness with Christ over any competing love. Our souls warrant paying **any price** with our bodies or our lives. Our primary job here is to prepare for eternity. And we must always keep that in that perspective. Christ tells us over and over to **seek first the eternal things**, to set our treasures **there**. Do not let anything get between you and your eternal bliss. Entering an eternity prepared for us is far more important than all its competitors. It is better to make it crawling in with no hand and no eye, than to show up at judgment in perfect physical health headed for hell. That is the point.

We need to do everything we can to avoid sin. Anything. And the biggest problem is that the sins start in our minds, so it is in our minds we must do the lion's share of battle.

So should a man cut off his hand or cut out his eye? If that would work, if that would stop that sin from winning in a person's mind, it would be worth it. But more than likely the hard work of conquering sin will be **elsewhere**. He has got to do **everything** and **anything** he can to stop a sinful habit, a sinful proclivity. And odds are he will not be able to do it himself. He will not be able to stop it in secret. No matter how painful the exposure of the sin is, it is worth doing. No matter how painful the remediation, the pain of **exposure** is **far better** than the pain that would come by following a sin to its spiritual end.

So how are we to conclude? Well in our battle against coveting, begin with thanksgiving. Begin with placing yourself in a position of trusting dependance. Begin with telling God you thank Him for knowing exactly what He is doing by arranging your life as He has. Then go from there.

Pay any price needed to expose and escape sin. Don't worry that the remedy is uncomfortable. The remedy, no matter how painful, is way more

comfortable than hell. If our preferred sin were limited to a hand or an eye, getting rid of it would be a small price to pay to save our souls. But the sin goes deeper and the battle must be done on that front. We must be about the business of killing sin so it won't be killing us.