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# “THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY”

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George Battey | January 14, 2014

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) Did the law of Moses forbid polygamy?
- 2) Under the Mosaic Law, did adultery hinge on the marital status of the man, the woman, or both?
- 3) Why does the Bible speak so much about adultery?
- 4) What five things are destroyed by the sin of adultery?
- 5) Is Jesus teaching that a tempting thought is sinful within itself?
- 6) Is Jesus forbidding people from thinking about the opposite sex?
- 7) What did Origen of Alexandria do which was later forbidden by the Council of Nicea?
- 8) What is the least effective way of ridding your mind of a tempting thought?

## INTRODUCTION

### **Matthew 5:27-30**

27 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

28 “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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.

This is one of the most relevant and needful sections today!

When I look around me and then read these words I wonder if there could be any teaching of Jesus that is more relevant and applicable than this.

## **TEXT (1)**

### **Matthew 5:27**

27 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

Here Jesus is quoting the 7th commandment (Ex 20:14).

Let us begin with this basic observation: **The OT permitted polygamy and on occasions required it.**

### **Deuteronomy 25:5**

5 “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s brother shall go in to her, **take her as his wife**, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her.

(This is why people were so interested in who their brothers married!)

What if the brother was already married? It did not matter! Plurality of wives would be required in this case.

God Himself gave a plurality of wives to David:

### **2 Samuel 12:8**

8 ‘I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your keeping, ...

**Adultery, then, was not a man having two, or more living wives.** The OT allowed polygamy.

(This fact will be important in studying Mt 5:31-32.)

## **RESTRICTING “ADULTERY”**

Adultery is a crime involving marriage. The only way for a man to commit adultery during the OT era was to have relations with a woman who was

- **Engaged**, or
- **Married**

If a man committed unchastity with an unmarried, unengaged woman, he would have to marry her:

### **Deuteronomy 22:28-29**

28 “If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out,

29 “then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

This man committed a sin, but he did not commit adultery – even if the man is married himself.

The prohibition against adultery hinged on the marital status of the woman, not the man.

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**ILL**: When Abimelech took Sarah (Gen. 20), what made it wrong?

- The fact that he already had a wife? NO!
  - Rather, the fact that she already had a husband!
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The penalty for committing adultery was death:

### **Leviticus 20:10**

10 ‘The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife,

**(NOTE: Not just a woman, but a married woman)**

he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, **shall surely be put to death.**

This death penalty was to be administered by stoning (Jn. 8:3-5).

<b>Unmarried woman</b> = sin, but <b>not adultery.</b>  Must marry her. Even though he's married, it's not adultery.	<b>Married woman</b> = <b>adultery</b> (death)
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So ... there's nothing to indicate the Pharisees had messed this command up and Jesus must now correct everything.

The prohibition against adultery forbade only the overt act. It did not include lust.

**When OT men lusted, they were guilty of sin, but they were not guilty of adultery.**

### **(GENERAL COMMENTS)**

Let us here make some general observations about adultery, because Jesus is not repudiating this particular command. **He will add something** to it, but adultery will still be as sinful as ever within the NT kingdom!

Adultery is a timely topic. It's a very prominent subject in the Scriptures.

**Q:** Why does the Bible mention it so often?

**A:** Because God's people are tempted by it!

I wish that were not true! I wish I could say that God's people are exempt from this sin and it plagues only unbelievers, but that is not true!

Only one man was called “*a man after God’s own heart*” (David) and yet even he was guilty of this sin! And let me tell you something: ***If David could fall to this sin, so could anyone here!!!***

## **ADULTERY IS DESTRUCTIVE**

Adultery is a very destructive thing! At least 5 things are destroyed:

**1) It destroys your purity.** You are never pure and innocent again.

**2) It destroys your reputation.**

Your spouse will think, “If he did it once, it’s possible (s)he might do it again.”

If you’re unmarried and commit fornication:

Your boyfriend (girlfriend) will think, “If s/he did this with me, s/he would do it with someone else.”

You will never have the full respect and trust of people again. You will have a scar.

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**ILL:** A scar is healed skin, but it will never be the same as before.

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One can be forgiven of adultery and fornication, but it will never be 100% the same as before.

**3) It destroys your morals.**

A person who commits adultery is not beyond doing other immoral things. If you lower your standards enough to commit fornication, you will probably be willing to lower your standards to do anything!

**4) It destroys your resistance.**

By committing adultery or fornication just once, your ability to resist it a second time has been weakened.

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**ILL:** Once you get pneumonia, your lungs are weakened somewhat. It is easier to get pneumonia a second time.

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And so it is with adultery!

**5) It destroys your soul.**

No matter how many people commit adultery and fornication, it is still a sin! Majority vote does not make these sins acceptable! Only one person has any vote on this subject: **GOD!**

**Hebrews 13:4**

4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Adultery and fornication are wrong and those who practice such will be lost in hell. But Jesus is going to add to the commandment against adultery.

**TEXT (2)**

**Matthew 5:28**

28 "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus is not quoting Scripture, He's making Scripture. This was His teaching. The new teaching of Jesus is: **lust = adultery.**

- **7th commandment** = “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14)
- **10th commandment** = “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife” (Ex 20:17)

In other words, the OT made these two sins separate, but Jesus now makes them one and the same.

If the OT taught lust = adultery, we would expect to see the same penalty applied to both sins. We would expect to see people stoned to death for lusting, but we do not see this evident.

**ARGUMENT:** The reason they didn’t execute men who lusted in OT days is because lust is secret.

A: God could have provided a way! (cf. Num 5)

## “LOOKING”

“whoever looks on a woman” (πᾶς ὁ βλέπων) – pres., act. participle stressing linear action. This is not just a casual look.

This man is continuously looking upon a woman — *staring*.

The idea of continuous staring is clearly seen in:

### **Luke 9:62**

62 ... Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and **looking back**, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus is not talking about someone who “*glances back*” into their former life. He is referring to someone who continually stares back and desires his former life.

### **Genesis 39:7**

7 And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife **cast longing eyes on Joseph**, and she said, "Lie with me."

Here Potiphar's wife "*cast her eyes upon*" Joseph. She did not just notice him, or glance at him.

- She stared at him.
- She fantasized about him.
- She longed after him.
- She yearned for him.
- She lusted in her heart for him.

This is what Jesus is describing in Mt 5. The man who continuously stares with lustful intents has "*committed adultery already.*"

## **WHAT JESUS IS NOT SAYING**

It is very important that we note what Jesus is *not* saying.

**Jesus is not forbidding men and women from thinking about the opposite sex!** God placed this desire within every man and woman.

### **1 Corinthians 7:7-9**

7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own **gift from God**, one in this manner and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;

9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Here this natural desire is called a "*gift of God.*" God has given this desire in varying degrees to men.

Now, the Biblical solution to gratifying these desires is marriage.

### **1 Corinthians 7:1-5**

- 1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.
- 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.
- 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.
- 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.
- 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Notice carefully, marriage allows a man to “*avoid fornication.*” This is the lawful and godly solution to the natural desires given to us by God.

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**CAUTION:** As a word of warning and caution, husbands and wives are instructed to render themselves to their spouses! When one refuses the other, that is sin!

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When Jesus forbade a man from looking upon a woman to lust after her, He had in mind the man who had no intention of pursuing an honorable marriage.

Let us illustrate the point with Abimelech in the OT:

### **Genesis 20:2-6**

- 2 Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “She is my sister.” And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.
- 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man’s wife.”
- 4 But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, “Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also?”
- 5 “Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she, even she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.”
- 6 And God said to him in a dream, “**Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart.** For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.

Abimelech did not sin!

Abimelech saw Sarah and was desirous to have her. But rather than pursue an immoral course of actions, he sought to fulfill his desires in an honorable fashion.

Notice that God said Abimelech acted with integrity!

- He did not know Sarah was already married.
- Had he known, he would not have sought to have her.

BUT, the man Jesus describes sees a woman, BUT he will not have her in holy matrimony because:

- He cannot, or
- He will not

Since he will not seek honorable marriage, he ought to stop thinking about her, but he refuses. Instead, he continues to stare and fantasize in an unholy way.

He may not actually commit the actual act of adultery, but if the opportunity presented itself – he most certainly would.

### **“CHERISHED LUST”**

Jesus is not discussing a *“flashing thought.”* It is not simply a tempting thought which Jesus declares to be sin; it is evil that is *cherished* in our hearts.

You may be tempted to commit this ungodly sin, but ***the temptation itself is not the sin.*** Jesus Himself was tempted but He did not sin.

#### **Hebrews 4:15**

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**

Sin comes when we respond in the wrong way to temptation.

### **James 1:13-15**

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by **his own desires** and **enticed**.

15 Then, **when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin**; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

**"has conceived"** – when we "*cave in*" to our desires, sin has occurred.

One man said:

*"If Satan comes up to my door, I cannot help it; if he lifts the latch and walks in, I cannot help it. But if I offer him a chair, and begin with him a parley, I put myself altogether in the wrong."* (R. Tuck, Pulpit Commentary, vol. 15, pp. 225-226)

Whether we sin, or not depends on how we handle the temptation.

## **APPLICATION**

The applications of this are numerous. Not only is it wrong to look lustfully upon another, it is wrong to dress, or act in such a way as to invite lust.

Matthew Henry:

*"Men sin; but devils tempt to sin."*

I think his point is well taken!

Arthur Pink:

*If lustful looking is so grievous a sin, then those who dress and expose themselves with the desire to be looked at and lusted after ... are not less but perhaps more guilty. In this matter it is not only too often the case that men sin but women tempt them to do so. How great then must be the guilt of the great majority of modern misses who deliberately seek to arouse the sexual passions of young men. And how much greater still is the guilt of most of their mothers for allowing them to become lascivious temptresses. (Sermon on the Mount, 83).*

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**NOTE:** In my observations, men tend to have a greater problem controlling lustful thoughts than women.

(Potiphar's wife is a case in point showing a woman can have a problem with lustful thoughts, but generally speaking, men have the greater problem.)

Perhaps this is why NT Scriptures concentrate almost totally on **women's** apparel.

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Our people do things now that greatly concern me. A hundred years ago our society would not have tolerated:

- dancing
- mixed swimming
- shorts
- tank tops
- mini skirts
- swim suits
- see-thru blouses
- spandex

Times are changing and it's not for the better!

May God help us to see these things for what they are!

Christian women are instructed:

### **1 Timothy 2:9-10**

9 ... adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,

10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

Here the godly woman is instructed to cultivate inner beauty.

**Q:** What does this imply?

**A:** That Christian men ought to be admiring inner beauty.

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**NOTE:** If Christian women are indeed cultivating the inner beauty (as they should), but Christian men are admiring outward beauty, then the Christian woman is at a disadvantage in obtaining a husband.

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Someone said:

*“If young girls in the church dressed and acted like the young preachers said they should, then the young preachers would go off and date someone else.”* (James Orten).

Sometimes that’s not far off base!

### **TEXT (3)**

#### **Matthew 5:29-30**

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.

Some people in history took these words of Jesus literally.

The best example of this was a 3rd century scholar named **Origen of Alexandria**. He went to all sorts of extremes renouncing *food*, *possessions*, and even *sleep*. Because of Mt 19:12 he literally made himself a *eunuch*.

In 325 AD the Council of Nicea forbade these practices.

I do not believe Jesus intended His words here to be taken literally, BUT even if they should be taken literally, it would not be a whit too strong if it meant the salvation of our souls.

### **WHY THIS PASSAGE IS NOT LITERAL**

There are two reasons why I believe Jesus did not intend a literal plucking out of eyes and literal cutting off of hands.

**FIRST**: If the right eye is literally plucked out, one would still lust with the left eye.

**SECOND**: Jesus plainly taught that sin resided within the heart of man, not the physical members of the human body.

#### **Matthew 15:19-20**

19 “For out of the heart proceed **evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications**, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

20 “These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

Evil thoughts reside in the hearts of men, not their physical members.

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**ILL**: My oldest sister had to eat a bar of soap for saying a bad word ... as though her mouth were responsible and now it's clean.

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If the literal eye, or hand were removed, sin would still be present in a man's heart.

## EYE, HAND & FOOT

The expression of plucking out eyes and cutting off hands is a favorite expression of Jesus. He will repeat it again in ch 18:

### Matthew 18:8-9

8 “If your **hand** or **foot** causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.

9 And if your **eye** causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

Here Jesus also mentions the **foot**. What is the significance of the eye, hand and foot. Is He just repeating the same thing three times for emphasis?

(Not entirely. The eye, hand and foot represent different areas of our lives.)

- **eye** = temptations that come through the eyes (**things we see**)
- **hand** = temptations that come through the hand (**things we do**)
- **foot** = temptations that come through the feet (**places we go**)

The **right** eye and **right** hand which indicates things that are especially favored by us (cf. Zech 11:17; Mt 5:39).

- If there are things we like to **look at** (pictures, films, books, etc.) that tempt us to sin, we must pluck them out.
- If there are things we like to **do** ...
- If there are places we like to **go** ...

## “BURNING BRIDGES”

“pluck it out” — 2nd aor., imper.

“cut it off” — 1st aor., imper.

The aorist tense indicates a “*one shot*” action (point action). Something done once and for all.

1) **To pluck out the eye** — to remove the eye from its favored position.

(But there’s a second step! We can’t just hold that eye in our hand!)

2) **We must cast it away** — to cast it irretrievably away.

This is “*burning bridges*” behind us! It is not enough to close the eye, or stop the hand; they must be removed completely!

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ILL: Stop smoking. Put cigarettes in drawer.

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Jesus is teaching it is better to enter life maimed than to retain the whole body and be cast into hell.

**Better to have a maimed social life than to have whole body cast into hell.**

## HELL

I want you to notice Jesus was not afraid to talk about hell! He used it as a negative motivation.

When we are tempted to sin we need to remember the consequences.

Sometimes we get so carried away with “*positive*” preaching that we forget Jesus mentioned hell (for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time – v22) — and He mentioned it in His first major discourse of which we have record.

Sometimes only the threat of hell will awaken us to refrain from sin.

Right now the **AIDS** epidemic has scared some people away from promiscuous living, but there’s something worse ... ***Gehenna hell!***

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**NOTE:** Remember this: There’s nothing that we must “*pluck out*” to go to heaven, which we will not eventually “*pluck out*” to go to hell!

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### **TAKING SIN SERIOUSLY**

Jesus is talking about serious business! He’s telling us that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is no laughing matter.

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**ILL:** If I went to the doctor and he said my eye had to be gouged out and thrown away, I wouldn’t leave laughing!

BUT, neither would I hesitate to have it gouged out if it would save my life!

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Our problem is we don’t see how serious sin is. If we really understood sin we would do ***anything*** to get it out of our lives!

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Now, what are some practical applications of these teachings of Jesus?

**1) If you aren’t married to someone, don’t act like you are.**

Kids:

- kissing
  - hugging
  - poking
  - pinching
  - tugging
  - rubbing
  - massaging
  - caressing
  - putting their hands all over each other
- 
- in public ... what do they do in private???
- 
- Men and women living in same house saying nothing is going on!!!
  - “Eating dinner” alone in a house like married people!

**2) Don't dress or act so as to arouse lust in others.**

We must “cast away” **everything** which incites ungodly lusts and passions!

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**NOTE:** Let me say a word about TV, videos, and internet — they’re going to be the ruin of our Christian homes!!!

- We teach lust is wrong and then watch it on TV.
- Fornication - TV.
- Adultery
- Homosexuality

If we can't control what comes into our homes, it's time to do some plucking out and cutting off!

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We must dispense with things that create lust and adultery in our hearts. We're going to have to start taking heaven serious!!

## **CONTROLLING THOUGHTS**

**Q:** How do you get rid of tempting thoughts?

Let me tell you the worst way to stop thinking adulterous thoughts: Keep telling yourself, *“I will not think lustful thoughts.”*

(This only reminds you of the thoughts you shouldn't have.)

In contrast to this, the Scriptures give us a solution if we will listen to them:

### **Psalms 119:11**

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

Mt 4 illustrates how Jesus dealt with evil thoughts which Satan placed before Him: ***He quoted Scripture!***

## **CONCLUSION**

In this section Jesus reminds us that the very thoughts and intents of our hearts will be used to judge us some day. There is an old proverb that says:

- **Sow a thought and reap an act.**
- **Sow an act and reap a habit.**
- **Sow a habit and reap a character.**
- **Sow a character and reap a destiny!**

**Ecclesiastes 11:9-10**

9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,  
And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;  
Walk in the ways of your heart,  
And in the sight of your eyes;  
But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.  
10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,  
And put away evil from your flesh,  
For childhood and youth are vanity.