

Mt.5:27\* "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  
31\* "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';32\* but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

In our text this morning we have two more” but I say” authoritative statements by Jesus. Each one, as the ones before this are addressing improper understanding and misinterpretation of things that had been previously taught under the Law Covenant and The Prophets.

The correction is given to address the righteousness of the Pharisees which must be exceeded by Jesus New Covenant kingdom dwellers and it is an indictment against those who called themselves teachers of the Scriptures. In both cases the intent of Scripture is missed and the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees has taken the Scriptures place. In verse 27, Jesus quotes the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment from the Tablets of Stone and immediately follows by saying “but I say unto you.”

His purpose is to show again, as with murder in the preceding passage that the teachers of Israel were only interested in the external aspects of God’s Laws and never searched for the true intent and purpose of the commandments. All of their present day teaching was concerned with murder and adultery and as overt acts, which disturb human society and break civil order. They are not seeing that it is the heart that is at fault, that is there is an underlying cause of all these matters that can disrupt society.

So what was adultery to these Old Covenant Israelites?

In Scripture it designates sexual intercourse of a man, whether married or unmarried, with a married woman. Notice I said married.

It was already custom for a man to be expected, not that all men did, to have sexual dalliances while married. The prohibition was against having intercourse with a married woman. All the inferences are in relation to men having this relationship not women.

It is categorically prohibited in the Decalogue (seventh commandment, Ex 20:14; De 5:18): "You shall not commit adultery." In more specific language we read: 'You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her. (Leviticus 18:20, NAS95). The penalty is death for both guilty parties: 'If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10, NAS95). The manner of death is not particularized; according to the rabbis it is strangulation. It would seem that in the days of Jesus the manner of death was interpreted to mean stoning ("Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such," John 8:5, said of the woman taken in adultery). Nevertheless, it may be said that in the case in question the woman may have been a virgin betrothed unto a husband, the law (in De 22:23f) providing that such a person together with her lover be stoned to death (contrast De 22:22, where a woman married to a husband is spoken of and the manner of death is again left general). Eze 16:40 (compare 23:47) equally mentions stoning as the penalty of the adulteress; but it couples to her sin also that of shedding blood; hence, the rabbinic interpretation is not necessarily disputed by the prophet. Of course it may also be assumed that a difference of custom may have been established at different times and that the progress was in the line of leniency, strangulation being regarded as a more humane form of execution than stoning.

The guilty persons become accountable to the death penalty only when taken "in the very act" (John 8:4). The difficulty of obtaining direct legal evidence is referred to by the rabbis in their writings. In the case of a mere suspicion on the part of the husband, not substantiated by legal evidence, the woman is compelled by the law (Nu 5:11-30) to submit to an ordeal, or God's judgment, which consists in her drinking the water of bitterness, that is, water from the holy basin mingled with dust from the floor of the sanctuary and with the washed-off ink of a writing containing the oath which the woman has been made to repeat. The water is named bitter with reference to its effects in the case of the woman's guilt; on the other hand, when no ill effects follow, the woman is

proved innocent and the husband's jealousy unsubstantiated. According to the Mishna, the primary body of Jewish civil and religious law, forming the first part of the Talmud these laws were handed down orally until written down around 200 AD

This ordeal of the woman suspected of adultery was abolished by Johanan ben Zaccai (after 70 AD), on the ground that the men of his generation were not above the suspicion of impurity.

Adultery was regarded as a heinous crime (Job 31:11). The prophets and teachers in Israel repeatedly upbraided the men and women of their generations for their looseness in morals and once in a while a reference is made to the condition of the heart, but the Law itself was not addressing the heart in its statements but it was meant to direct one to one's sin as our New Testament tells us:

**Ro 3:20\*** because by the works of **the Law** no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through **the Law** comes the knowledge of sin. **Ro 3:21\*** But now apart from **the Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, (meaning Christ) being witnessed by **the Law** and the Prophets (they pointed to Christ)

Romans has more to tell us about this.

7:5\* For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.6\* But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. 7\* ¶ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."8\* But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. 9\* I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;10\* and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;11\* for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.12\* So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.13\* Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.14\* ¶ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.15\* For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.16\* But if I do the very thing I do not want to *do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. 17\* So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.18\* For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.19\* For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.20\* But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.21\* I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.22\* For I joyfully concur with the law of

God in the inner man,<sup>23\*</sup> but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. (if reading this sermon please notice: the Law=Mosaic law=conscience)  
Paul is saying in reflecting upon his condition when he was a Jew under the Law that it pointed him to sin and because the Law itself did not address the heart to fix it, he sinned even more. He was under both the law of conscience and the written code of the Mosaic Law

So, naturally for the people of Israel where luxurious habits of life were indulged in, particularly in the large cities, a tone of loose living set in: in the dark of the evening, men, with their features masked, waited at their neighbors' doors (Job 24:15; 31:9; compare Pr 7), and women forgetful of their God's covenant broke faith with the husbands of their youth (Pr 2:17). The prophet Nathan confronted David after his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, with his stern rebuke ("Thou art the man," 2Sa 12:7); the penitential psalm (Ps 51) was sung by David as a prayer for divine pardon. Promiscuous intercourse with their neighbors' wives is laid by Jeremiah at the door of the false prophets of his day (Jer 23:10,14; 29:23).

All of this adultery was taking place and was only being judged by the outward act when someone was caught. The way it was looked at was that guilt was only present in the act of being caught, even if one had some conscience struggle at first, once they gave in and it became a habit only being caught mattered because there was no other judgement for adultery according to the Law as they understood it.

Now, Jesus says something that will really be shocking.

Ver.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.

Can you hear the murmurings and the see the shaking heads, the looks of guilt and the frustrated faces and the challenge to what was being accepted in the society of the day. Can you see all the self-righteous men, for a moment grasping for breath.

I don't know what was occurring, but I can relate to being shook up with guilt when I believe I can justify my behavior because of what society allows as a norm and then I am confronted with Jesus saying "but I say unto you." It cuts to the marrow and the bone,

His Word that is sharper than any two edged sword for His word brings in the entrance of light and exposes the darkness of the wicked heart, even my own.

Just as speaking words with evil malice is equal to murder, looking at a woman with lust in mind is already committing adultery. And actually the idea goes a little further than that. It also carries the weight of meaning to lust with the intent of causing her to commit adultery. It is an act of premeditation.

Now before Jesus time there was a Rabbinical writing that stated:

Though I regard iniquity in my heart to do it, even in thought, yea, against God himself, as if I had expressed it with my lips, he does not hear it; that is "he does not reckon it to me for sin"; because the holy blessed God does not account an evil thought for an action, to them that are in the faith of God, or of the true religion."

But also before Jesus' time a Rabbi wrote:

"the thoughts of sin are greater, or harder, than sin itself."

And another wrote:

"everyone that looks upon a woman with intention, it is all one as if he lay with her."

But the Pharisees of Jesus day had obviously not remembered or bothered with that teaching.

Now look at Jesus words. He says everyone, every man not just a married man is guilty of committing adultery even if it is only a look with a thought of intent.

How many men are there today who through pornography, movies and television and reading the Sunday newspaper with advertisements showing near naked women and girls Have difficulty with these kinds of thoughts? How many *Christian* men have this problem. Brethren, sexual immorality of one sort or another is the most frequent reason for most pastor's counseling today. Don't think that young men who believe they are Christians are not fornicating, don't believe that our Christian colleges are not frustrated with the amount of sexual activity that there is on and off campus.

Now, none of this takes women out of the picture. But our text is addressing men because married women wanted to stay married because their husbands, as we will find out in our next study, could divorce them for just about any reason at all.

And if a woman did not remarry, life could be very difficult for her in a male dominated society.

Immorality amongst women existed all through Israel's history. Women who fornicated were called harlots. Women of all sorts were just as guilty of sexual immorality and remember there are times when God calls the nation of Israel a harlot and an adulteress because of her unfaithfulness and lust for worshipping other Gods.

Jesus says He expects radical measures to be taken to keep His kingdom people from this kind of sin. How serious is Jesus about this new understanding of the commandment based on His interpretation of it?

**Vs.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.

Jesus is now making it clear that consistent habitual sinful behavior is not the mark of His people, for anyone in the kingdom. When it is the norm of a person's life without any desire to take the radical measures that are necessary to overcome sin, and particularly sexual sin in this text, one will be just like the person who is a habitual speaker of malice towards another, the murderer with words of evil intent - the end will be hell.

There are no excuses for any one who claims to be one of Christ's to continually be living with this kind of behavior in secret or publicly.

Jesus is using what is called hyperbole when he uses such extreme language about removing the eye or the hand. Hyperbole means a deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect, for example, "I could eat a million of these" Well, you couldn't but it expresses either your hunger or your liking of something that you find very palatable. His point is that we are to go to whatever extreme we need to control our lusts.

Now remember, He is laying down the foundations for New Covenant living. All of the things that help us to do this are not being taught yet but they will be and they will receive the Holy Spirit. We have all the New Testament and the Holy Spirit to help us accomplish this.

2 Peter 1:1\* ¶ Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:2\* Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord 3\* seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.4\* For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Jesus will eventually have them equipped to do this starting at Pentecost. He is giving instruction to them that will have its purpose in the near future and beyond to the end of the age. He is showing that if there are those who are going to be His disciples - and of course His soon to be Apostles are with Him on the mount - this is the cost of discipleship. To have the benefits of being favored by God requires living in a God honoring way. It is a radical transformation of belief and living. It is to be like nothing the world has ever seen and that is exactly what it was when the world was being turned upside down because of the preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of Christ- His birth, death, resurrection and ascension and as a result by the grace of God people were changed by God and converted to a new and living way under a new and better covenant, the covenant who is Christ Himself.

We cheapen grace when we use all kinds of excuses for not living for God in a Christ exalting manner.

We cheapen grace when we say we have tried everything when we have tried nothing biblically to overcome our sin.

We cheapen grace when we love church traditions more than Christ.

We sometimes are no better than the Scribes and Pharisees who did not know God's word as they thought they did and proved that their traditions were more important when they crucified Jesus.

Jesus said take out the sinful eye and cut off the sinful hand if necessary but we know that the eye and the hand are ultimately obedient to the heart. Jesus said looking with intent and premeditation leads to the physical. As Jesus is correcting the Pharisees and Scribes for only looking to the externals of the Law Covenant His extreme language in this passage is meant to also make us look beyond the external. Jesus knows that one less

eye or hand will not keep us from sinning or keep someone from hell. Every one of us would be blind and a quadriplegic at sometime if that is what He meant.

He has already taught His people blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

It is this striving for purity through obedience that will keep the hand and eye from habitually sinning, especially in the matters of sexual immorality. A heart for God and hungering and thirsting after righteousness will help the eye and hand not to sin.

Doing more toward being salt and light in this wicked and dark world will help us to overcome our sinful lusts and desires.

Disciplining ourselves to be normal Christians according to Christ's commands will strengthen us when the temptations come.

If we are truly the blessed of God then remember that means that we are favored by God because of His grace The result of that favor is that we are in Christ and we are able to grow more and more satisfied with Him and Him alone. We are the spiritually prosperous out of the billions of people in the world. We have a higher standard of ethics and morality because we are being conformed to the image of His death. Our God is working to will and to do of His good pleasure in our lives and we are to work out our salvation with faith and obedience knowing that we will sin, we will be tempted but we are equipped to overcome our sin and, to be sorry for our sin and to mourn over our sin and be glad that when we come to our Father and ask His forgiveness He will grant it, fully and freely because of what Christ has done for us.