

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus had introduced two ideas that are key in understanding 5:21-7:12. First, He made it clear that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to *fulfill* them (5:17); that is, the OT had a prophetic function that pointed to Him and His teaching. Second, He said that those who desire to enter the kingdom of heaven must have a righteousness that surpasses the scribes and Pharisees. From Matthew 5:21 on, Jesus illustrates how the OT anticipated His teaching and how true kingdom righteousness is more than the external observance. Jesus' demands go far beyond the Jewish requirement.

In the first anthesis, Jesus said that the sixth commandment "you shall not murder" pointed to His own teaching about the sins of anger, insults, and contempt (5:21-26). "The visible and punishable act forbidden by the commandment is only the outward expression of an inward desire" (France, 204).

In verses 27-30 He turns to the seventh commandment (Exo. 20:14) "you shall not commit adultery". This is treated the same way as the first example (5:21-26). This commandment anticipated Jesus' teaching about purity.

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';

5:28 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.

5:29 "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.

5:30 "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.

When God designed humanity, He made men and women to be sexually attracted to each other. Marriage is God's means of satisfying sexual desire and perpetuating the human race. It is also a life-long union of two people. Genesis 2:24 says, "two become one flesh". Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6). Marriage is also a covenant (Mal. 2:14; Prov. 2:17); that is, it is a binding oath made between a man and a woman and between them and God. In the OT marriage is a symbol of the covenant between God and His people (Isa. 54:4-6; Ezek. 16:7-8). In the NT Jesus replaces the Father as the Bridegroom. The institution of marriage is patterned after Christ's covenant relationship to the church. Therefore, the highest meaning of marriage is that through marriage the believer puts the covenant relationship of Christ and His church on display. It is for this reason that the husband must love his wife *as* Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25-27) and that the wife is to submit to her husband *as* to the Lord (Eph. 5:22-24); their actions portray God's relationship with us. Marriage was created by God and exists for God's glory.

"You shall not commit adultery" focuses on the sanctity of marriage.

In the OT, adultery was defined as having sex with another man's wife (the culture viewed things from a male perspective). Thus, Jesus' contemporaries narrowed the seventh commandment down to one specific act - having sexual intercourse with someone who is married. By sticking to the letter of the law, purity was more attainable. By contrast, Jesus' declaration is that the *desire to have sex* with a married person is also sin that is liable to judgment.

We should assume that Jesus' words apply to all forms of immorality. "To argue that the reference is *only* to a man lusting after a woman, and not vice-versa, or *only* to a married man and not an unmarried . . . is to be guilty of the very casuistry which Jesus was condemning in the Pharisees" (Morris, 87-88).

In one sense, Jesus is not making a radical departure from the Mosaic law. The tenth commandment says "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Covetousness is inward desire for something that is not yours. When combined with "You shall not commit adultery" both the inward desire to have your neighbor's wife sexually (coveting) and the outward act (adultery) are plainly forbidden. Although the law has been fulfilled in Christ, that does not mean that there is no continuity with the law and the fulfillment. As one writer put it, "Those who move from one country to another may no longer be bound to the laws of the land they leave; still freedom to do whatever was forbidden in the old country is assumed at their peril. Murder and theft will likely be prosecuted, not – to be sure – as violations of statutes which no longer apply, but as transgressions of the new laws to which the immigrants have become subject" (Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, 199. 200). That is, verses 29 and 30 do not abrogate adultery as something "fulfilled" and no longer applicable, but function to introduce the radical terms of true righteousness. This is not an exposition of the seventh commandment, rather, "By equating the covert desire with the overt act Jesus was demanding a new relationship which actually transcended the requirements of the Law" (Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, 191).

Jesus concludes, "**If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you**" and "**If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you**". In metaphorical terms He tells us of the intensity with which we are to pursue kingdom righteousness. Abstaining from illicit sex does not in itself achieve the will of God; it does not meet Jesus' standard of kingdom righteousness; one must pursue inward purity and radically eliminate anything that stands in its way. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." And in Colossians 3:5 he also writes, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry".

Lust is an intentional looking at or thinking about another person in order to stimulate or delight in an impure desire. The person who feels this desire at a first glance and then looks again or continues to think about that person sexually with lustful intent in order to retain and increase that impulse is lusting and sinning against God (Broadus, 109).

Lust and adultery are different acts but both abuse God-given sexual attraction by applying it in a manner that is outside of God's design and purposes. For a single, lust is the desire to enjoy sexual pleasure outside of marriage. If one is married, lust is also dishonoring the sanctity of one's marriage and disregarding the authority of God who is the stipulator of it. It is a failure to glorify God by failing to display Christ's covenant relationship to the church.

All sin is an abandonment of seeking pleasure in God to pursuing other "lovers." It is knowingly and willfully casting aside the glory that God has adorned us with as human beings by choosing something

else instead (Ro. 4:16). Dreaming about sinning or desiring to sin are themselves evil acts and that is exactly what lust is.

To “*stumble*” is used often in Matthew. In some cases, it refers to being offended by someone else (where the passive verb is used). But it more often denotes something more catastrophic, “a stumbling which deflects a person from the path of God’s will or salvation (13:21; 18:6; 24:10; 26:31-33) . . . a ‘stumbling block’ is a person or thing which gets in the way of God’s saving purpose (13:41; 16:23; 18:7)” (France, 205). As Jesus says, “**It is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.**”

In sum, Jesus tells those who wish to be His disciples that they need to be pure inside and out. They need to deal with lust drastically. It should not be allowed to take even the smallest hold in one’s life. The sin of lust cannot be delt with gradually; it must be hated, crushed, dug out (cf. Col. 3:5-7).

We are bombarded with temptation daily. Advertisements are often tinged with sexual overtones. Pornography is a multi-million-dollar business and easily accessible through the internet. The majority of pop songs focus on sex and physical desires. Movies are filled with suggestive language and one-night stands are considered normal. Many in our society believe there is nothing wrong with adultery, especially if it is accompanied with love. It’s into this society that Jesus speaks His piercing words, “Everyone who looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.” As society moves farther from this commandment, Jesus moves in the opposite direction. According to Jesus, sin leads to hell, which is the ultimate reason it should be taken seriously (Ro. 9:12-14; 13:11-14; Eph. 4:17-24; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 4:1-6).

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

1. **Attraction to the opposite sex and sex itself are not sinful.** Both are designed by God and are necessary to ensure the perpetuation of the human race. Jesus is not forbidding these things, but is addressing their abuses which break the bounds of God’s design and purposes.
2. **God created sex and He has the right to regulate it according to His design.** God made humanity and therefore knows what is best for us. As Lord, He has the right to say what is moral. God doesn’t regulate sex to rob us, but to bless us. Lust can lead to sexual addictions, bondage to the flesh, guilt, depression, and sexual dissatisfaction in marriage. It can lead to greater sins such as rape, child abuse, incest, etc. Following God’s design makes society flourish and allows individuals to experience the greatest joy and sexual satisfaction.
3. **It is not lustful looking that creates sin in the heart, but a sinful heart that creates lustful looking.** Our strong desire to sin is evidence that we need a new heart. Our inability to overcome sin points us to our need of the gospel.