

Purity of Heart

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Date: 21 July 2024

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[0 : 00] If you're there in your Bible, will you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together?

Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 through 32. It was also said, May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

King David is one of the most interesting people, I think, in the Bible. He experienced a meteoric rise from ruddy shepherd boy to giant slayer to king of Israel.

He was a man God described as being a man after his own heart. 2 Samuel 8, verse 14 gives this great summary of David's reign.

It says, And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. What more could a person want? David appeared to have it all.

[2 : 10] The Lord brought him victory after victory after victory. And with each victory, David's kingdom grew, and it grew stronger. But David had a major weakness.

A weakness that many men share. That weakness is noted a couple of times in 2 Samuel 3, verses 2 through 5, and chapter 5, verses 12 through 16.

David's weakness was women. More specifically, David's weakness was lust. As David's kingdom prospered and multiplied, so did his propensity to multiply wives and concubines for himself.

To both secure his political position and satisfy his sinful passions. But sin doesn't satisfy. David's many wives and concubines were evidence of that.

In 2 Samuel 11, we find David in a place where he's not supposed to be. That verse says, David is not where he is supposed to be, which leads him to do something that he is not supposed to do.

[3 : 37] David is at home. He gets off of his couch. He goes for a walk on his roof on the palace, which oversees the city. He sees a beautiful woman, and she's bathing.

Instead of diverting his gaze from her, he gazes. He ogles. He stares with lust in his heart. Israel's great king lowers himself to the position of a peeping tom.

He can't get this woman out of his mind. Verse 3 says, David sent and inquired about the woman. This is an ancient form of what people call Facebook stalking today.

He finds out her name. It's Bathsheba. He finds out that she's married to Uriah, a man who is currently engaged in the battles that David had become too bored with.

But her relationship status does not deter him. He doesn't care that she is married to someone else. His sinful appetites sear his conscience. Instead of denying himself, he indulges his passions.

[4 : 40] Instead of trusting in God's word, he gives in to his feelings. He takes her. He lays with her. And once that's done, he sends her back home. However, their time together results in a child.

And this creates a major problem for David. His adultery will be exposed unless he finds a way to cover it up. So David orchestrates Uriah's death on the battlefield.

He sacrifices Uriah's life to save himself and keep his sin from being exposed. David then marries Bathsheba and further covers his tracks in an attempt to bring legitimacy to his sinful actions.

By the end of chapter 11, it appears that David has successfully hidden his sin. David thinks he can breathe a sigh of relief. Some harm was done, but no harm was done to him.

There's a couple of verses at the end of chapter 11 that reveal just how callous David had become about his own immorality. When the news comes from Uriah, or from Joab, excuse me, that Uriah has died on the battlefield, David sends a reply back to Joab, his general, and says in verse 25, Don't let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another.

[6 : 12] This loss of life, this sacrifice made to cover up his sins did not displease David in any way. However, verse 27 at the end of that chapter tells us this, But this thing David had done displeased the Lord.

God eventually sends Nathan to confront David to expose the sin that he thought he could cover up. Nathan tells David that the child conceived by Bathsheba in him will die.

He informs David that the sword shall never depart from his household. The lewd actions he committed in secret would be conducted in a humiliating public display one day by his son, who would, like other sons of David's, rebel against him.

And their actions would bring a lot of grief, and a lot of sorrow, and a lot of shame to David. All these consequences, all this death, all this sin, stemming from one lustful look.

In Matthew chapter 5, verses 27 through 32, Jesus addresses the incredible amount of damage that can result from one lustful look.

[7 : 34] He urges us not to give in to our internal desires and external pressures to seek to normalize and legalize sexual immorality.

He tells us that no sacrifice is too great to maintain our moral purity. And that's the main idea for this morning's sermon.

No sacrifice is too great to maintain moral purity. In our text today, Jesus continues to unmask the self-righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees who trusted in their traditions and external religious observances for salvation, thinking that that made them morally pure before God.

But as he had done before, and as he will continue to do in this sermon, Jesus reveals that a right standing before God does not come through external actions, but an internal transformation in the heart.

In these verses, Jesus uncovers the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees in believing that they were unaffected by sexual immorality when the reality was they were guilty of both committing adultery themselves and creating an environment where adultery and sexual immorality was normalized in some ways, legalized.

[8 : 58] In these verses, Jesus urges us to understand that no sacrifice is too great to maintain moral purity because the consequences and the costs they exact are much greater than the sacrifices we should make to avoid them.

In this section of this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides us with two actions to maintain our moral purity.

Why does this matter? We live in a culture that has normalized and legalized sexual immorality. Marriage is an institution designed by God to reflect his unique and special relationship with the church.

But marriage in our culture is seen more as a contract that can easily be broken than a covenant, a union that Jesus says no man should ever separate.

Our culture encourages our young people to obey their sexual desires and discourages them from getting married. They don't see moral purity as a virtue but a vice, something to be liberated from.

[10 : 20] In recent years, in recent days, we've seen the devastating effects of moral failure due to sexual immorality in our churches. I could give you a long list of names of pastors, evangelists, apologists, whose entire ministries went up in flames overnight.

Men whose actions have brought shame and dishonor to their wives, to their children, to their churches, and worst of all, to the name of Jesus Christ. And it all started with one lustful look.

Just as a small match can set an entire forest on fire, so too a brief look can ignite lustful passions that destroy marriages, families, churches, and societies.

And so Jesus, again, provides us with two actions to maintain our moral purity. And to answer the question, does this matter? It matters a whole heck of a lot.

First action, he says, To maintain moral purity is to sever yourself from sexual immorality. Sever yourself from sexual immorality.

[11 : 37] In verse 27, he begins, You have heard that it was said. Again, when Jesus says throughout this sermon, that you have heard or the ancients have told, he is not referring to Scripture, But the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees developed over hundreds of years, which lowered the standards of God's righteousness.

Verse 27, he continues, You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. The tradition of the scribes and Pharisees was based on Scripture.

We know that one of the Ten Commandments is, Thou shalt not commit adultery. So far, so good. But the scribes and the Pharisees saw this sin as only an external issue.

So long as someone didn't commit the physical act, they were, in their view, innocent before God. But Jesus says that this sin, along with all other sins, are a matter of the heart.

And so he continues in verse 28, But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[12:52] This truth was one that God had communicated through the Old Testament Scriptures that the scribes and Pharisees had. And as students of those Scriptures, its truth is one that they should have known.

For example, Job in chapter 31 and verse 1 and then verses 9 through 12 says, Proverbs 6.25 says, Again, Jesus makes the point that the heart of the matter here is the matter of our hearts.

The word for look that he uses in the Greek is a present participle, and it refers to continuous looking. Jesus is talking about an intentional looking with the purpose of lusting.

He is speaking about someone who looks so that they may satisfy the evil desires that are in their heart. The scribes and the Pharisees apparently concealed lust in their heart and believed they were righteous because they hadn't followed through with a sexually immoral act.

And Jesus will have none of that. In John 8, some scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught in the act of adultery. They were ready to stone her to death as the Mosaic law commanded.

[14:42] But Jesus knew their hearts. He was aware of their hypocrisy. It takes two to commit this act. And interestingly, they conveniently forgot to bring the man who was just as guilty as the woman.

Jesus drew on the ground as he waited to give his response. Maybe he wrote the names of some of the people that they had lusted for in the dirt.

Maybe not. We don't know. But Deuteronomy 13.9 and Deuteronomy 17.7 say that the witnesses of a crime are to start the execution, and they should not be guilty of the same sin that they are executing someone of.

We do know what Jesus did say. He said to them, He who is without sin cast the first stone. And as the accusers left and Jesus remained, he told the woman to get up and to sin no more.

He forgave her. Bottom line, these men thought they were righteous, but they weren't. In verse 29, Jesus continues, If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

[16:02] For it is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Jesus' instructions here at first glance seems a bit incongruous. If the problem is the heart, if it's an internal problem, then how can an external action remedy it?

I mean, that's what Jesus' argument has been to this point. External forms of keeping the law cannot save anyone. So if the problem is the heart, what good would it do to pluck out an eye or to cut off a hand?

After all, you'd still have another eye and you'd still have another hand to look with and to sin with. Please understand this. Jesus is not calling for self-mutilation.

Some men, godly men, in the past have taken Jesus' instruction here to an extreme that he did not intend. Jesus is speaking figuratively of those things that tempt us, of those things that make us more susceptible to sin.

[17:21] In Jewish culture, the right eye and the right hand represented a person's best and most precious faculties. Jesus is saying that we should be willing to give those things up.

Things that we may cherish, if doing so, will protect us from being exposed to things that will tempt us. Self-mutilation will not cleanse the heart.

But a person with a cleansed heart that seeks Jesus, his kingdom, and his righteousness should be willing to sever from their life whatever is necessary to maintain moral purity.

Just as the outward act of adultery reflects a heart that is already adulterous, the outward act of forsaking, of severing whatever is harmful reflects a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

And so I ask you, are there people, places, or possessions you have that put you into positions where your heart is tempted to lust?

[18:34] Jesus says to sever them from your life. Because the consequences are extreme. For someone like David, the consequence was a lot of pain, a lot of grief in his earthly life.

For someone who is not saved, the consequences are eternal. You know, I've known too many young people who enter into a relationship with someone who does not share their same values as a Christian, someone who is not a Christian.

But they are convinced, I will win them to Jesus. They use evangelism as an excuse to date them. The reality is, they are being controlled by their physical appetites than by the Holy Spirit. And obedience to that desire ends up bringing them a lot of hurt.

There are places that I'm sure a lot of your co-workers probably would like you to go to with them. And in your mind, you think this could be a great way to develop relationships, friendships, or maybe even to secure a promotion.

[19 : 55] But those places will expose you to things that no friendship or promotion is worth sacrificing for. So many of the TV shows and the movies that we watch normalize and celebrate sexual immorality.

How about our phones and our smart devices? Those things are often more precious to us than we realize.

And oftentimes, those possessions, those things lead us to look at things and search for things in secret, exposing our eyes to things that fuel our sinful desires.

Jesus says, sever those things from your life. Again, think of all of the pain and heartache David could have avoided if he would have severed his gaze from Bathsheba that day.

Don't underestimate the great damage that you can bring to your life, your home, to the people that you love.

[21 : 14] Because of one lustful look. No sacrifice is too great then to maintain moral purity. And moral purity is maintained by those who sever themselves from sexual immorality.

The next action Jesus gives us for maintaining moral purity is to support God's design for marriage. While still addressing sexual immorality, Jesus turns his attention to marriage and divorce.

In verse 31, he says, It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. The scribes and the Pharisees permitted a man to divorce his wife for just about any reason, based on their misinterpretation of Deuteronomy chapter 24, verses 1 through 4.

Let's look at that text. It says, It says, The focus of this passage is not the question of whether or not divorce is permitted.

It does not provide for divorce, much less command it. Rather, it is a very narrow and specific law given to deal with the matter of adultery. It shows how improper divorce leads to adultery, which results in defilement.

[23 : 16] Through Moses, God recognized and permitted divorce under certain circumstances when it was accompanied by a certificate, but it was not his way of condoning or commanding divorce.

God's permission for divorce was but another accommodation of his grace to sinful people.

Matthew 19, 7 through 9, records Jesus' answer to a question about divorce posed to him by some Pharisees who sought to test him.

That passage says, The certificate did not make divorce right, but it gave the woman some protection.

It protected her reputation from slander and provided proof of her legal freedom from her former husband and her consequent right then to remarry.

The Hebrew word for indecency in Deuteronomy 24 describes every kind of improper, shameful, or indecent behavior which stops short of the physical act of adultery, because the penalty for that was death.

[24 : 50] Deuteronomy 24 makes it clear that if the divorced woman remarried and was divorced again, or even if her second husband died, she could not go back and remarry her first husband. But the primary purpose of this instruction that Moses gave in Deuteronomy 24 was not to excuse divorce, but to prevent it in the mess that comes from it.

What God gave as a reluctant permission, the scribes and Pharisees turned into a legal right. The Bible's teaching on divorce cannot be understood apart from its teaching on marriage.

Immediately after God created Adam and after he created the woman from Adam, God said in Genesis 2 24, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage is God's plan. Whether a married couple are believers or not, in marriage they are participants in a union that God established.

From the very beginning, God intended marriage to be a monogamous, lifelong union between one man and one woman. The Lord designed men and women with the ability to procreate in a way that uniquely reflects that unity.

[26 : 19] It is an intimacy that is not to be shared with any other. As a result of the fall, the God-ordained roles of men and women have morphed into a struggle between male chauvinism and women's liberation.

And one of the most tragic consequences of that struggle is the propensity for divorce. Instead of dealing with the trouble that arises in marriage, instead of seeking God's help, instead of seeking restoration, instead of extending forgiveness, people believe that divorce will solve all of their problems.

But the marriage union, the one God created and designed for the formation of families, which brings stability to societies, is a union he doesn't desire to be broken. Divorce is a destruction of his work.

Divorce is a product of sin. It's not a product of God. He may permit it in the case of adultery, but even in that case, he does not command it.

The entire book of Hosea is a picture of God's forgiving and patient love for his people Israel. And it's dramatized by Hosea's forgiving and patiently loving his wife, Gomer.

[27 : 47] You know the story. Gomer leaves Hosea and she prostitutes herself. She forsakes him. She was unfaithful to him in every possible way.

Eventually, Gomer's actions lead her not to the good life, but to the auction block where she is up for sale to serve as a slave to the highest bidder.

By this point, she's been passed around. She's been used and abused. She's been stripped of her purity and probably much of her beauty. This was the end she deserved.

But God says to Hosea, go back to this woman, this woman who has left you, this woman who has humiliated you, and redeem her.

Bring her back home. Lavish her with a love she does not deserve. Love her. Devote yourself to her. Be faithful to her despite how unfaithful she's been to you.

[28 : 55] Brothers and sisters, we are Gomer. We are the ones who continually sin against God. We are the ones who so often turn to things other than God, believing that those things will satisfy us more than him.

Yet God, in his love and his grace, is faithful to the unfaithful. God loves the unlovely.

He redeems sinners who dishonor and who reject him and humiliate him. Although Hosea and Gomer is a picture of God's faithfulness to his people, it is an apt illustration of how to deal with a spouse who is guilty of some kind of sexually immoral act.

God's love seeks to hold the union together. This is certainly Jesus' attitude towards us, his church, who he calls his bride.

In verse 32, Jesus goes on, but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality makes her commit adultery and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[30 : 16] To the legalistic, self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was saying, in effect, you consider yourselves to be great teachers and keepers of the law by allowing no-fault divorces.

But you have caused, you have promoted, and you have legalized sexual immorality amongst God's people. By lowering God's standard to meet your own, you have led many people into sin and into judgment.

The scribes and the Pharisees used a little paperwork to legalize their lust, and Jesus wouldn't have it.

You know, none of us is capable of going back in time and undoing our past. If I had that ability, there's a lot of things that I would try to go back and undo and change, but I can't do that.

We can't do that. We don't have to live, or excuse me, we have to live in the now. We must be people of the present.

[31 : 30] We don't have any other option. Divorce for unbiblical reasons is sin. When someone remarries for any reason other than sexual immorality or desertion by an unbelieving spouse, the Bible says, that is sin.

However, God is a gracious and forgiving God who immediately forgives us of our sins, the sins that we confess.

1 John 1, 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

All unrighteousness. Not just present unrighteousness or future, past as well. Maybe you're a Christian and you've had a divorce either before or after your salvation. and the divorce was not based on biblical grounds. What should you do? Ask for God's forgiveness. [32 : 46] If need be, to the best of your ability, seek reconciliation. If you're remarried, move forward with the present spouse that you have and determine to have the kind of marriage that models the relationship that Jesus has with His church.

The good news of the gospel is that God does not make us pay for past sins. God does not make us fix our past to be saved or to stay saved or to be forgiven in the present.

And look, that's not chief grace, that's grace. Charles Spurgeon says, memory looks back upon past sins and yet with no dread of any penalty to come.

For Christ has paid the debt of His people and received the divine receipt. And unless God can be so unjust as to demand double payment for one debt, no soul for whom Jesus died as a substitute can ever be cast into hell.

If you've experienced that grace, the grace of salvation, shouldn't you desire to extend that grace to others?

[34 : 10] As repentant sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we should gladly extend that same forgiveness to others, especially our spouses. We just should encourage one another in our marriages.

marriages. We should reject what the world says about marriage and we should support God's design for marriage, the one that our culture rejects.

Sever yourself from sexual immorality, support God's design for marriage, maintain moral purity, and honor the Lord with your redeemed life. So how should we adjust to what we've heard?

Seek Jesus' kingdom and His righteousness. As you sever yourself, you should seek Jesus, His kingdom, and His righteousness.

And if you're seeking Jesus and His kingdom and His righteousness, you will sever yourself from sexual immorality. You will support His design for marriage. One lustful look caused David and many others a lot of pain.

[35 : 23] His inability at times to sever himself from sexual immorality and his many marriages and relationships with concubines did not support God's design for marriage. And there were consequences for that.

God put the story of David and Bathsheba in the Bible to warn us against the destruction that results from an unwilling to sever ourselves from sexual immorality and support God's design for marriage.

But, by God's grace, this unhappy story has a redemptive ending. David and Bathsheba had another son, Solomon, who, unfortunately, followed in the sinful ways of his father, but, through whom God faithfully kept His covenant, His promise to David to establish His throne forever. And through that family line, full of all kinds of sexual immorality, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came.

David remained at home instead of going to battle. Jesus willingly left His heavenly home to fight the battle against sin for us and to win that battle on a cross and three days later through an empty tomb.

[37 : 01] David took someone else's life to cover up his sin. Jesus gave His life, laid down His life to cover our sins, to forgive us.

David took a bride who was not rightfully His. Jesus, through His sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, has purchased a bride composed of people from all tribes and tongues, a bride who is so much like Gomer.

sinners and He's redeemed us from our slavery. He has set us free to live our new redeemed lives in Him.

Maybe God's Word today has done to you what the prophet Nathan did or the prophet Nathan, excuse me, yes, did to David, pointing the finger at Him in declaring you are the man.

You're guilty. In that case, what should you do? 1 John 2, 1 through 2 tells us, my little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

[38 : 21] But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

God, through His Word today, is calling us all to sever our gazes from worthless things that will destroy our earthly lives and that will bring a lot of pain and a lot of grief and a lot of heartache to the people we love the most.

I encourage you, if you're struggling with this, any of these things, what you should do now during the invitation or sometime later, is to get on your knees before the Lord who knows all and who sees all and ask Him for forgiveness.

I encourage you to tell someone you trust, someone who can be used by the Lord to keep you accountable. But I encourage you to pray, I encourage you to uncover all of those things before the Lord and then get up and move forward in the grace and the truth of Jesus Christ and the reality that He is faithful to forgive us of all our sins.

And you do not have to bear the weight of that sin and the guilt and the shame it has brought you anymore because Jesus will bear it for you.

[40 : 23] Forgiving our pasts, interceding for us in the present, and having secured our eternity with Him forever.

You've heard the warning and I hope and I pray for all of us that we will heed it because the destruction that results is a terrible thing.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before You.

Lord, having heard Your Word, deals with a topic that hits home to so many of us. These are hard truths to hear because of how convicting they are.

But God, You tell us time and time again that Your Word is to be trusted over our feelings, that it's Your Word that lights our path, keeps us stumbling into dark areas.

[41 : 31] God, that it's Your Word that makes our path straight and keeps us from venturing into the consequences of our sins that are hurtful.

not just to us, but to others, especially those who we love. Lord, we need Your help in this. We know, Jesus, the words that You describe make it clear that this is a very serious thing, that we shouldn't think tomorrow of what things we might need to sever from our lives, but we need to be active about doing that today, so that we don't end up leaving a lot of hurt in our wakes.

God, I pray for those who have been divorced and who are remarried. God, I pray that through Your Word today, You've encouraged them, encouraged us all to know that we cannot undo the past.

You don't give us that ability. we can't do it. You encourage us all to move forward in the grace and the truth and the love and forgiveness that You have lavished upon us.

And God, I pray for all of us who are married that we would desire to have a marriage that honors and reflects the love and grace that we've received in Jesus Christ.

[42 : 57] Lord, I pray that we would be a people who desire to maintain our moral purity and that in doing so, we would be a greater witness to a society that has been given over to a debased mind.

And that, God, they would see how blessed it is to follow the Lord, how good it is to know Him as Savior. And that, God, through that opportunity, we would, through that witness, we would have opportunity to share the gospel.

that people would be saved. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.