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Today I am going to be preaching about some subjects that are mature in nature and quite personal. I will be sharing some of what Jesus has to say about lust, adultery, and divorce. These are painful topics for many of us because of our own experiences or because of what we are going through right now. I pray that while it may be difficult for some of you to hear, that it may be helpful. The church has to speak to these issues and this sermon is definitely rated PG so if you think your sensibilities may be offended, I won't be offended if you don't want to stay for the sermon.

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone **who looks at a woman** for the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her **in his heart**.

If your **right eye** causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your **right hand** causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Last Sunday, we talked about how Jesus referred back to the Ten Commandments and the saying, "*You shall not murder*," and Jesus pushed that commandment deeper to the anger that is at the root of violent acts. If we eliminated anger and contempt from our lives and relationships, we'd rid ourselves of most of the wrong acts that are done. Violence comes from the overflow of anger and contempt. Today, Jesus refers to another commandment that has to do with our sexuality, "*You shall not commit adultery*," and again people probably would have responded, "*I've heard that since I was a kid in synagogue school*." What they hadn't heard was what Jesus said next, "*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman for the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*." That's when people in the crowd turned to one another and said, "Oh man, are we in trouble."

Whether we are a man or a woman, Jesus' point is that just because you don't commit adultery with a certain person, doesn't mean your relationship with that person in the area of sexuality is as it should be or that you yourself are what you ought to be with

reference to your sexuality. Your heart can be very far from the kingdom of God in this regard, even if you have never committed adultery.

In the Old Testament adultery had a precise and limited definition: sexual relations between a married or engaged woman and any man other than her husband. Adultery, therefore, was committed only against the husband, never against the wife. It was considered a grievous transgression (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Leviticus 18:20), to be punished by the death of both persons involved (Deut. 22:22-24). We don't know whether this was ever carried out, but it may have been, and the threat of execution still apparently existed into the first century as we see John 7:53-8:11. The law was probably intended to ensure that any child born to the wife was the husband's child. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus broadens the definition of adultery saying that a husband could be held responsible for committing adultery against his wife (Mt. 5:32; Luke 16:18).

While it may not fit our 21st century view, in Israel at the time of Moses, the wife was viewed as a piece of property belonging to her husband. This is also reflected in the tenth commandment about not coveting anything that belongs to your neighbor's household beginning with his wife. The Hebrew verb for covet implies **intentional planning to obtain something for oneself**.

What Jesus is prohibiting in Matthew 5:28 is not just the forming of a plan for seducing your neighbor's wife, or husband, but the mental act of lusting after her or him in the first place. Just as anger is the root that leads to murder, lust can lead to adultery.

It is important to understand it is not a sin for a man to look at a woman, indeed in the early church women were to be welcomed as sisters. Paul wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:2) that he was to speak *"to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters – with absolute purity."* What Jesus prohibits is looking at a woman *"for the purpose of lusting after her."* The new relationship with women among Jesus' followers required of men a new kind of self-discipline in mastering their sexual desires. **In our time, this need for self-discipline and purity is a part of every believer's life.**

Because we live in an age of television and the Internet, we have far easier access to temptation in regard to our sexual behavior than people in the past. When I was in middle school the raciest show on television was Charlie's Angels, now reruns of that show would look downright quaint compared to Desperate Housewives, The Girls Next Door, Howard Stern, and a host of other programs. Sex is also used to sell virtually

every product under the sun from alcohol to cars to personal care products you name it. Temptation is everywhere.

There is an excellent description of how we fall into all kinds of temptation, but especially sexual temptation in Job 31:1-8, where Job shares how he maintained his integrity. He says, "I have made a covenant **with my eyes**, how then **could I look** upon a virgin (or young woman)? If I have **walked with falsehood**, and **my foot has hurried to deceit** – if **my step** has turned aside from the way, **and my heart has followed my eyes**, and if any spot has clung to **my hands**...if **my heart** has been enticed by a woman, and I have **lain in wait** at my neighbor's door...that would be a heinous crime."

Adultery or other inappropriate sexual relationships begins with our eyes, moves to our heart and mind, then finally to action. Nothing "just happens" in this area of our lives. It happens because we look for it, we're open to it, we fantasize and think about it, and we try to make an opportunity happen or when the opportunity presents itself, rather than resisting it in our integrity, we welcome it in our weakness.

To be right sexually before God is to be like Job. Job did not let his eyes, heart, mind or body dwell on or engage in practices he knew would cost him his integrity before God, his family or his community and lead to pain, heartache, strife, and sin. Unfortunately, millions of us do not have Job's integrity or moral strength. Pornography is now a \$10 billion a year industry and an epidemic in our country wrecking lives, destroying marriages, distorting and warping young people's views of healthy relationships. The rise of the Internet has made pornography pervasive and easily accessible in the privacy of one's own home. Craig Gross and Mike Fisher, Christians who have begun the ministry www.XXXChurch.com say there are three levels that they find folks in: the Targeted – those of us who get spam email from the porn industry, the Tempted – those who struggle and find themselves looking now and then, and those in the Trenches who are addicted to porn and it has ruined their life, their intimacy with their spouse or their ability to have a healthy relationship with some one else.

A person can move through these levels very quickly and often folks wait to get help until it is too late and the damage has been done. The lie people tell themselves is that what they're doing isn't hurting anyone else - well it's hurting you, and your current or future relationships. You are doing damage to you soul. The church needs to be a safe place for folks to talk about issues like this one. We're a congregation filled with moral failures, just in different areas of our lives. We all need the grace and forgiveness of Christ and we need to get on the path to purity and respect. For those of you dealing

with this issue I want to recommend two things, going to www.XXXChurch.com and looking at some of the resources and helps they have including free software you can download to help you hold yourself accountable with others who are close to you. For those of you who would rather read, a book you can get is Steve Gallagher's *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*. Perhaps we can look at getting a group or two together for people who would find that helpful in working on this issue. Whether one is male or female, we are playing with fire when it comes to looking to lust, obsessive desiring in our heart that leads to action.

There is a story of two Buddhist monks who were walking to their monastery and were caught in a drenching thunderstorm. They came to a stream swollen beyond its banks. Standing there was a beautiful woman wanting to get across. One of the monks asked, "Can I help you?" The woman said, "I need to cross the stream." The monk picked her up and carried her across and placed her safely on the other side. He and his companion continued to the monastery. That night his companion came to his room and said, "As monks we are not to look at a woman or to touch a woman, and you did both!"

The first monk said, "I left her there at the stream, are you still carrying her?"

In Proverbs 6 there is one of many warnings about the importance of following the commandments and the danger of lust that leads to adultery. It tells us the purpose of wise teaching is "to preserve you from the wife of another, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes...the wife of another stalks a man's very life. **Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?** (Proverbs 6:24b-27)"

The current advertising campaign is wrong, what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas, it impacts our soul and our relationships. How much wiser it is not to "go to Vegas" at all. When Jesus says if your eye causes you to sin, pull it out and throw it away, if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away, he means, you could cut off and pull out every part of your body with which you can sin, and you can still have a wicked, sinful heart. If you dismember your body to the point where you could never murder or even look hatefully at another, never commit adultery or even look to lust, your heart could still be full of anger, contempt, and obsessive desire for what is wrong. Jesus says in Mark 7:21-23, "**For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit,**

licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Sadly, adultery often results not just from lust but when there is a lack of emotional as well as physical intimacy between a husband and wife. **“Intimacy is a spiritual hunger of the human soul, we cannot escape it.”¹ Intimacy to be really known and really knowing; this is what we long for, it is larger than sex;** sex is an appropriate part of that, but if you just go for sex, you’ll never get the intimacy.

Last year former Jets quarterback Joe Namath embarrassed himself when he appeared drunk in an interview with Suzy Kolber during a Sunday night football game and said he wanted to kiss her. It was quite a contrast to an interview Phyllis George did years ago with Dallas Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach who is a committed Christian. It was kind of a dull interview until Phyllis asked, *“Roger, how do you feel when you compare yourself to Joe Namath, who is so sexually active and has a different woman on his arm every time we see him?”*

“Phyllis,” Roger answered, “I’m sure I’m just as sexually active as Joe.

The difference is that of all of mine is with one woman.”

Adequate intimacy is the best protection against inappropriate sex.

Intimacy comes only within the framework of **mutual faithfulness, trust, and respect.** Where these are missing or absent, intimacy will be lacking as well. Intimacy is destroyed by anger and contempt. Many marriages are fatally undermined because of the anger and contempt one mate has for the other – whether for their body, mind, talents, family or for something he or she has done. Sexual delight between mates is impossible when anger and contempt are present and faithfulness, trust and respect are absent.

It is important to understand, especially for young people and single people, “that sexual desire is not wrong as a natural, uncultivated response, any more than anger is or pain.” God thinks sex is a wonderful thing, after all God is the one who created it! However, it is to be shared within the context of an intimate marriage relationship. The Old Testament book Song of Solomon is full of the language and imagery of passionate love between a bride and groom. The pair sings of a walled garden (4:12, 15, 16; 5:1), a secret place open only to the devoted couple. There they enjoy mutual delight and intimacy, with a heightened appreciation of the beauty all around them and within them.

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 163.

It is not wrong to notice someone is attractive or to desire him or her, it is not wrong to feel, as the song in South Pacific says that, *“There is nothing like a dame, nothing in the world.”* We all will have thoughts that are influenced by what we see, which is why we need to be careful about what images we expose our selves to on our computer or television. We all are tempted – the Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, the key is not to sin. This goes back to what we talked about with Job, it is one thing to notice a person is attractive, it is something very different to plot how we can be with them or use them versus seeking to truly get to know them as persons.

In today’s passage from the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about lust, adultery, and divorce. Often the first two lead to the third. In the Old Testament, divorce is acknowledged as something that unfortunately happens and some regulation is put on it (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Jesus’ teaching goes behind the regulation of divorce to God’s intention regarding marriage. Jesus does not forbid divorce absolutely, “but he makes it very clear that divorce was never God’s intent for men and women in a marriage. The intent in marriage is a union of two people that is even deeper than the union of parents and children, or any other human relationship. They are to become “one flesh,” one natural unit, building one life.”²

Jesus is saying that even when a man or woman has done everything legally, doesn’t mean he or she did everything right in regard to the relationship. Divorce impacts people in an indelible way, no matter how much worse it may be to stay together. Divorce is a painful experience for everyone involved, it is not an experience any one seeks for its own sake, but a brutal marriage isn’t good either. The order of the Sermon on the Mount is not an accident. Jesus deals with divorce after having dealt with anger, contempt, and inappropriate and obsessive desire. We can ponder how many divorces would occur if anger, contempt, and fantasized desire were eliminated from a marriage. Hard hearts may make divorce necessary to avoid greater harm, but the heart that Jesus gives us is not hard. Divorce, if it were done right, would be done as an act of love. It would be directed by love and done for the honest goodness of the people involved, it would be the best we can hope for in spite of the heartbreak and loss that are a part of it.

Talking about the difficult issues of lust, pornography, adultery, and divorce, we recognize how much we need the forgiveness of God and how much we need to do our part in becoming more fully followers of Jesus whose eyes, lives, and choices reflect

² Willard, Divine Conspiracy, 169.

what Jesus would do if he were living our life. Part of being in the kingdom of God is learning how to treat all people with purity and respect as sisters and brothers in Christ. When some men brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught in the very act of adultery (why they were watching and why they didn't bring the man we don't know), they all had stones in their hands ready to kill her. Jesus told them to let the one who was without sin throw the first stone, and they went away beginning with the oldest.

The truth is we are all sinners who have fallen short of the glory and desire of God. We need to put down the stones, and stop looking for others whose sins are different than our own or "worse" in our eyes. It is far more beneficial to work on yourself and the areas that you need the Holy Spirit to help you overcome. If you interpret the Sermon on the Mount legalistically, you will never succeed and just end up feeling guilty and frustrated. **What Jesus is sharing are not laws, but examples of how the heart he gives us in the kingdom causes us to be.** We cannot do what needs to be done without the inner transformation Christ works in us. People falsely believe they're going to do these things and continue to be the person they are at present. It doesn't work that way. God's grace leads to the inner transformation of the person that leads to outer fruit that is a reflection of God's goodness, purity, love, and respect.

Remember, God is far more concerned with where we're going, than where we've been.