

You have heard... But I say ... 2 - Adultery

Introduction / Review

This portion of the Sermon on the Mount has six points. Each beginning with “you have heard.” Jesus found the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees to be woefully lacking in spiritual and emotional understanding of the Scriptures. Each of these commands had a general application for a forbidden activity (or in the case of divorce a general reason for an authorized activity). But the teachers in the days of our Lord (just like ours today) were content with simple formulas. For them, it was a simple civil code, but Jesus knew it had always been much more. The Law was given to regulate the eternal spirit of man, not just his body. The forbidden act was the result of a defiled spirit. The guilt occurred at the moment of defilement, not the moment of action!

1. It was said	You shall not murder	But I say	Whoever is angry 5:21-22
2. It was said	You shall not commit adultery	But I say	Whoever looks at a woman to lust 5:27-29
3. It has been said	Whoever divorces his wife	But I say	Except sexual immorality 5:31-32
4. It was said	You shall not swear falsely	But I say	Do not swear at all 5:33-34
5. It was said	Eye for eye & tooth for tooth	But I tell you	Not to resist an evil person. 5: 38-40
6. It was said	Love neighbor & hate enemy	But I say...	Love your enemies , 5:43-44

God's intent in forbidding adultery was to remove all feelings that might lead to the act. Since it is a sin to commit the act, the true servant of God will so regulate his conduct and life so that the act is impossible. As Jesus points out, the lustful look always makes adultery possible so that is where both the prohibition and the guilt for violation begins

You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Mt. 5:27-28

Of all the commands this one was the most obvious and blatant of their false and shallow teaching. Within the Ten commandments themselves was exactly what Jesus revealed here.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's. Deut. 5:21

Within the word covet is the desire, the finding pleasure in the possessions of another and the lust that leads one to want to take it for themselves. So in complete harmony with the Tenth Commandment, Jesus warned that the stirring of interest is the point where the guilt for adultery is reckoned by God.

Looking to Lust

Since Jesus identified “*whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,*” as the point of sin, we must carefully examine His words. The grammar Jesus used is very important to understand his concern and warning. The word “looks at” is not a verb, but a present active participle. We might grasp His meaning better with the phrase: “*the one looking at.*” Jesus expressed the look as a continuing action. It is not a glance, it is a “lingering looking,” with a specific purpose identified by the preposition “for” which gives the goal or purpose of this “lingering looking.” The purpose of this look is “to lust:”

“epithumeo... prop. to keep the thumos turned upon a thing, hence [cf. our to set one's heart upon] to have a desire for, long for; absol. to desire [A. V.] to lust after, covet, of those who seek things forbidden ...”
(Thayer, p. 238; 1937)

This man wants to feel desire, he wants to long for, he seeks sexual passion, he is looking for something in the woman to desire, or seeing something in the woman begins to desire. It is the lingering looking, not the first glance. Regardless of what might be seen, no one has any control over the first glimpse or glance. The look Jesus described is either the second lingering look after glancing away, or not looking away after seeing her and allowing the emotions of desire to form. It is the lingering look that takes in beauty, sexuality, immodesty, etc. and allows lust to grow. No matter what happens after this, the sin has already occurred and repentance is necessary.

Although Jesus singled out adultery, this principle is true of all lusting after that which is evil.

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. Jas 1:13-15

When a man looks at a woman, there is always the risk of an enticement. God created all males with the ability to lust in this way. God created this passion to be enjoyed with his wife. Any stirring of this passion toward another woman other than his wife can only be created by the enticement he allows to be created. Many of the warnings in the Proverbs are directed toward this very enticement. An enticement that can never even begin if a man will be content the wife of his youth.

Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. Pr. 5:18-20

For the Christian man, repentance is necessary any time that first look leads to the second lingering looking that leads to lust. The second lust or desire/pleasure is felt, it is a violation of God's law.

Even Job Knew

Job was one of the patriarchs who lived before the Law was given. When speaking of his own personal righteousness, he plainly stated exactly what Jesus revealed.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman? 2 For what is the allotment of God from above, And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? 3 Is it not destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity? 4 Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps? 6 Let me be weighed on honest scales, That God may know my integrity. 7 If my step has turned from the way, Or my heart walked after my eyes, Or if any spot adheres to my hands, 9 If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, 10 Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her. 11 For that would be wickedness; Yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment. 12 For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase. Job 31:1-4, 6-7 9-12

Job had made a covenant or contract with his eyes that he would not allow and "lingering looking" upon a virgin. Nor would he allow his heart to be enticed by a woman. Job knew this would be a sin. As a married man who honored God's will, he had made this covenant to look away from all women except his own wife, after the first glance because he knew this was God's expectation. Job considered even the looking that could lead to enticement as the moment when "wickedness" and "iniquity deserving of judgement" occurred.

Joseph Conquered and David Fell

The most powerful and striking contrast is in how David and Joseph responded to enticement. It is obvious from the accounts that Joseph's enticements were much greater than David's was a chance glance at a stranger that led to the exact point Jesus identified as sin. Joseph had to endure day after day whatever enticement and temptations Potiphar's wife could devise. Yet Joseph was victorious!

And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9 There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. 11 But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, 12 that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. Gen 39:7-12

Her longing eyes and direct appeal failed because Joseph refused to lust. We do not know what she did "day by day." to continue to tempt him, but he never allowed the lust to conceive or bring forth sin. He saw her request as "great wickedness" and as a "sin against God." With such a view he could not possibly do it. This is exactly what Jesus revealed was the intent of the command "you shall not commit adultery."

David did not succeed when he faced even less temptation. Because he was drawn away by his own lust he was enticed. Even after being told she was the wife of another man, David did not stop his desire.

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. 2 Sam 11:2-4

David was walking on the roof of his own home. He glanced into a court yard or bathing area of a house below. When that glance revealed a woman bathing, he had choices. He could have looked away and never allowed lust to form. But he allowed her beauty to lead him to lust after her in his heart. It became a "lingering looking" that led to a powerful fiery lust. When he asked about her and found out she was the wife of another man, he should have realized he had violated the Tenth Commandment and immediately went in to his own wife. But he had allowed the fire to get too strong. Instead of controlling the lust, he sent for her and committed adultery. Joseph clearly withstood much greater temptation than David because his heart was free of lust.

Adultery is a Grievous Sin

The Lord's disciples must ponder the Lord's words carefully. The sin of adultery is a grievous one. Outside of murder, it is doubtful that anything harms a neighbor or a mate as much as this sin.

Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. 33 Wounds and dishonor he will get, And his reproach will not be wiped away. 34 For jealousy is a husband's fury; Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. 35 He will accept no recompense, Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts. Pr. 6:32-35

This is something to be carefully considered. Those who “love their neighbor as themselves” realize how hurt they would be if someone committed adultery with their wife. The special emotional and spiritual bond God created for a husband and wife in marriage is both intense and powerful. The sexual relationship is unique and special beyond our comprehension. When it is honored, it is a very precious possession. When stolen, it is a grievous theft. This should never happen! No one who truly loves another would ever allow it to occur. It is a deep and terrible wound to inflict on someone. Only a very selfish, unthinking or lust-filled mind would consent to it. Joseph was right when he said “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

Jesus was backing up the loyalty and devotion of a husband to his wife. It must not only include his body and actions, it must also control his mind and emotions. No loyal husband will allow feelings of desire to grow in his heart toward another. This is clear from the one flesh relationship that God revealed in the garden.

One Woman Man

In the garden of Eden, God made His desires known by creating one woman for Adam. He wanted Adam to be a one woman man. It was not good for man to be alone so God created a woman for him. All who would honor their Creator will stop longing for any woman but the wife of their youth. This is God's will for all men.

Drink water from your own cistern, And running water from your own well. 16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be only your own, And not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth. 19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. 20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress? 21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, And He ponders all his paths. 22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, And he is caught in the cords of his sin. 23 He shall die for lack of instruction, And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray. Prov 5:15-23

This is the true purpose for the command “You shall not commit adultery.” When a man is completely satisfied with the sexual beauty of the wife of his youth, he is within the boundaries of this command. When he refuses to be enraptured by the immodest wiles of an immoral woman, he is within the command. This has always been God's will. Job and Joseph knew this. Israel had been taught. It is God's will that we learn how to possess our own vessel (body) in sanctification and honor. Again, this is the real intent of the law against adultery.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. 1 Thess 4:3-8

The command not to commit adultery means we must “know how to possess our own vessel in sanctification and honor.” As Job all true servants of the Lord must learn to make a covenant with their eyes. We must live as Joseph who was so concerned about the great wickedness of adultery and his loyalty to Potiphar was so important that he could not feel lust toward his wife.

God wants us to respect His order in both desire and practice! This is how Joseph and Job stayed pure. Jesus demanded that all His disciples live up to this standard. Those who are building on the rock submit to this no matter what the cost. The damage done from a failure here is too great not to put one's greatest efforts into it.

For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life, 24 To keep you from the evil woman, From the flattering tongue of a seductress. 25 Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids. 26 For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life. 27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? 28 Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared? 29 So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; Whoever touches her shall not be innocent. 30 People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. 31 Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; He may have to give up all the substance of his house. 32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. Pr 6:23-35;

Jesus Made the Command Forceful

Jesus closes this section with an important comparison. He knows man and how habits can be formed that can lead one away from this command and create a stumbling block. So Jesus compared the momentary pleasures of sin with eternity in the torment of hell. As a man ponders the importance of

the activities that are leading him to stumble with the importance of eternal life, an important conclusion must be drawn. There is nothing more important than entering into life.

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. Mt 5:29-30

These words obviously fit in to the conclusion Jesus makes at the end of the sermon.

Every one therefore that hears these words of mine, and does them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: 25 and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock. 26 And every one that hears these words of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: 27 and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof. Mt 7:24-27

These are not words we can ignore. They are not words to be considered and set aside. If we find these words apply to us and we are unable to keep ourselves from the feelings and thoughts the Lord here forbids, then the strongest possible measures must be taken to overcome them. If we find something in our lives even as important to us as a hand or an eye (job, hobby entertainment, place to go, etc.), if it causes us to stumble then it must go! The word “stumble” is defined:

skandalizo ... to put a stumblingblock (impediment) in the way, upon which another may trip and fall; to be a stumbling-block; ... metaphorically, to cause or make to stumble; to offend a) to entice to sin ... (Thayer p. ; 4624).

So if the eye, hand, job, hobby, place of entertainment leads us to stumble, when we trip and fall over it so that it leads us to the very lustful look Jesus forbids then it must be removed from our life.

Though some have taken this literally they are taking it out of context. It can't be literal. One eye, one hand or one foot will never be enough. There is still another eye, hand or foot to accomplish the sin. Removing one eye or one hand won't stop the enticement.

Jesus is speaking figuratively of the important things in our life. If the internet causes us to stumble we need to remove it from our life. If the TV or movies, books or magazines cause us to stumble then we need to throw them away and remove them from our life. If swimming or other vacation activities cause us to stumble and create enticements to sin, then we need to cut them off.

Jesus is clear and forceful. We must learn to remove all enticements or we will be cast into hell.

- 1 Where are the commands against murder and adultery found?
- 2 What does Jesus forbid under the command against adultery?
- 3 What does the grammar tell us about the first look?
- 4 What about the second look with an intent to desire?
- 5 What did Job know about how strongly this desire needed to be controlled?
- 6 How did Joseph fare with his temptation?
- 7 What about David?
- 8 What is the difference between these two men?
- 9 How does the account of man and women in Genesis help us to understand God's will?
- 10 What do the Proverbs say about how loyal a man should be?
- 11 What did Paul reveal about how we are to possess our vessels?
- 12 How does Jesus make this command forceful?
- 13 What does the word stumble mean?
- 14 Is this literal?