
Grace to Live - Living in Sexual Wholeness

Matthew 5:27-30 | Sunday, August 19, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

GRACE TO LIVE LIVING IN SEXUAL WHOLENESS Matthew 5:27-30

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that 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.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the life of Jesus and the ministry of Jesus is that he redeems sexually broken people. When you look at scripture and read about his life and ministry, these stories of redemption are some of the most moving aspects in the life of Jesus. The event with the woman Jesus met in Samaria is recorded in John chapter 4. She was trapped in a cycle of bad relationships, married five or six times. When she met Jesus she was living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus meets her in that place of brokenness and completely renews and transforms her life -- and she becomes the first Christian in her town. It's an amazing encounter as she experiences the healing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There were prostitutes that followed Jesus. One in particular was very troubled, who worshipped Jesus extravagantly. We are told that her story is recorded in scripture and will be told forever because of her relationship with Jesus Christ as she was restored.

Famously, there is a woman we are told about in the gospel of John who is trapped by the religious leaders of her day and brought to Jesus. She is caught in the act of adultery. It's fascinating -- they bring her, but they don't bring the man. Jesus is put in a place where he is asked if he believes the Old Testament law and if this woman should be stoned, and if he'll lead out in that act and participate in it. Then Jesus famously said, "Let the person who is without sin throw the first stone."

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Jesus was the only person present who was without sin and who could have thrown the first stone. But instead of doing that, he went to the cross for her sin and for our sin, including our sexual sin and our sexual brokenness. Jesus restores. Jesus forgives. Jesus heals. The forgiveness of God is free. It's grace. I encourage you today to receive the forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus forgives us so that we are then free to follow him and live in his grace and live in his strength. He doesn't want us to remain trapped in those cycles and addictions and habits and bondage and darkness and brokenness. He wants to restore our lives. He wants to help us live sexually whole lives. That's right. Sexually whole lives. That is the theme that we encounter today as we are going through the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is teaching his followers how to follow him and what life as a follower of Jesus looks like.

When my wife and I were engaged, I was 26 years old. I had moved back home from Fort Worth, started work here at this church, and I was living with my parents for the six months of our engagement. One day at lunch, my parents got really serious and they decided to have "the talk" about the birds and the bees when I was 26. My sweet parents, now both with the Lord. It was so painful.

First of all, they couldn't say the word "sex." They just couldn't bring themselves to say it. So we talked about "relationships and such." And the "such" part was the sex part. You can imagine how difficult that conversation is when all this vocabulary is off limits, right?

What was so sweet about that conversation is that my parents were loving me in that moment to talk about something that **that** was very...they had never had anyone have that conversation with them. It was totally out of their realm of comfort. It was this act of love. They were trying to say, "Listen, you are entering into marriage, and sex is a big part of that. It's not what people expect as they go in. You need to stop and think about it." Those points registered with me.

Now, Jesus talks about it, and he talks about it in a very direct way. In fact, I'm going to break this passage down into three spheres, three locations that Jesus gives us to talk about our sexual lives. Let me give those to you. They are:

1. The internal,

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2. The external, and
3. The eternal

Three spheres, three locations. I want to jump right in and start with #1. The internal.

1. Internal.

This passage begins with Jesus saying (as is the pattern throughout this whole section of the Sermon on the Mount): “You’ve heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus is helping us to internalize truth. He tells us that it’s not enough to avoid external sexual sin, but that we are to be pure in our hearts and that sexual sin actually takes place inside of us as well as outside of us. He is, again, internalizing truth. Then the external.

2. External.

Jesus continues: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that 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.” Here, I think we first need to take note of the fact that Jesus is using hyperbole. He is using a form of speech that exaggerates in order to drive home a point, and that we are not to literally apply this passage. We are not to cut off parts of our body in order to abstain from sin.

But I think the clear understanding of this passage is that it applies to both the external and the internal. Jesus is saying this: “Once I tell you to win the battle of your heart, you may be tempted to think that what you do on the outside doesn’t matter. That’s not what I am saying. I am telling you to take extreme measures to overcome sexual temptation and sin, both on the inside and on the outside.”

I have had the opportunity as a pastor, for decades now, to counsel people in the area of sexual sin, and overcoming sexual sin. It’s not unusual to be in situations where people are really caught in addiction. There are times when I’ve given counsel to people to take very difficult steps. “You know

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what? You need to just get rid of your computer. You need to change jobs. You need to take really difficult steps. I can't tell you that you have to do this, but I'm giving you counsel to suffer difficult, lesser loss in order to avoid a much greater loss."

So, internal, external, and eternal.

3. Eternal.

Same verses, verses 29 and 30. It's troubling, isn't it, that Jesus uses this language? "For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." Do you get the gravity of this? Jesus is loading this up with eternal consequences.

You know, the great thing about a message like this is that no one goes to sleep. I promise not to give personal illustrations throughout this message, for the most part. Friends, if we just take that very literally and at face value, in one sense we could misunderstand the whole message of the Bible, right? We could think, "Okay, I earn my way to heaven. I earn my way into a relationship with Jesus. I earn my way into a relationship with God." No, no, listen. I started this message by telling you that Jesus' whole ministry is one of receiving and restoring sexually broken people. That really is the story of humanity.

So, I want to be careful here to say let's not misunderstand or misinterpret or misapply, but it does mean that when we stand before God, he is not going to ignore sexual sin. And here is where we can find hope; here is where there is hope. It's to be able to say, "You know what? Jesus paid for my sexual sin. It was nailed to the cross and paid for in full." That's good news, isn't it? It's very good news!

And then, here is the tricky part. If you are a follower of Jesus, he is teaching you to fight this battle. He says, "Listen, I want you to fight it on the inside. I want you to fight it on the outside. And I want you to fight it with the awareness that there are eternal consequences."

We take so lightly the consequences of sexual sin. Because we get it -- this is a crazy message in our society. This is just so narrow and fundamental and backwards, according to society. But Jesus is saying, "Actually, this is the way to life. I am inviting you to a life," he says, "where you have sexual wholeness, where you have sexual fulfilment, where you don't find sex ruling over you, but you find it as I've designed it to be - pleasurable and bringing together husband and wife in the oneness of

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marriage.” Jesus is saying to you, “Don’t have sex with a person that you are not taking responsibility for in the covenant of marriage. That’s the biblical view of marriage.

Some of you are mad at me right now. That’s okay. I love you. Stay with me. Don’t leave. At least give me another 90 minutes to finish this message. There is a church leader, a very famous church leader, who started a whole movement within the church in Chicago, and revelations have been coming out in the past few months about a history of inappropriate behavior with women. Devastating, devastating consequences.

A very dear friend of mine in our own city was a pastor, experiencing amazing fruit and growth -- multiple affairs exposed. He lost his position in that church. He lost his wife. His children were alienated from him. All of his support and friends were hurt and devastated. Immediately 25% of the church that he pastored left the church, many not coming back for years.

There are great consequences to sexual sin. It devastates people. The reason we need to hear this message is that we’ve been told a lie, that it just doesn’t matter. It’s just an act of physical pleasure. Jesus is saying, “No, no, no, no. It’s much more than that.”

We understand that though as a Christian I may not lose my salvation, praise the Lord, if I fall, but I’m never going to trivialize the consequences. I need to be aware. It’s very healthy for me to think about my wife, my six children, this church, the relationships, everything that would be impacted...I don’t even want to finish the sentence...if I should, God forbid, fall in this area.

So this is what I want to do. To help us fight the fight in these three spheres, I want to give you a principle or two that unpack this and help us to understand it. Are you ready?

- I. Your physical eyes are connected to the eyes of your heart.

Notice in the passage that Jesus says everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. There is something about how the physical eyes connect to our hearts so that what we view and look at and focus on and take in, we delight in, and we shape the contours of our heart according to what we are choosing to see.

And reciprocally (boy, that’s hard to say), our hearts and our desires in our hearts and the motivations of our heart direct our eyes, so that if you are viewing pornography on a regular basis,

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you are shaping your heart toward that desire. The way sexual sin works -- Jesus describes this end of destruction. He is warning. He is really ramping it up in this form of speech by saying: "Just run from this! Do whatever you have to do to get free from this!" Because sexual sin in a way that's like all sin, but different (I'll show you in a minute), is not satisfied. The darkness grows. It needs more to be satisfied. It takes over more and more and more of your soul and becomes darker and darker and darker.

Part of the good news is not just that Jesus gives you a new heart. He offers you a new heart and transformation and a power from within to transform that. But, you can start to shape your heart by what you take in. So look at your spouse, if you are married. Right? A lot. Some of you are thinking, I'm going to go home and say to my spouse, "Hey, the pastor said..." Let's be careful how we apply this message. But there's truth to that. There's a reason why you can be 90 years old and she's the most beautiful thing in the world, because that's what has filled your eyes for the last 60 years. That's what has filled your heart.

There's a reciprocal relationship here. Let me show you this passage: Matthew 6. This is in the Sermon on the Mount. We are going to get here in this series. "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light..." Some of you are thinking, "Brian is overstating this connection between the eye and the heart," so I just want to give you a little biblical underpinning for this.

Jesus is saying, "Listen, your eyes - if they are taking in darkness, you are really in darkness." The word here for "healthy" is actually a Greek word that literally means single or simple, like simplicity - single devotion. A simple, single devotion to God is what keeps our eyes and our hearts healthy. So taking external measures - it isn't enough to fix our hearts, but it's too important to ignore. Understanding this dynamic between eyes and hearts is just helpful. It's practically helpful.

He goes on. "...but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" We get to a point where we are so full of darkness we try to do something in the light, but our hearts are constantly pushing towards more darkness. Peter described false teachers in this way. He said, "Their eyes are full of adultery." That's graphic, isn't it?

The second principle that will help us unpack and apply this is:

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II. Sexual activity impacts us at the core of our being.

Jesus talks about this command in terms of inner sexual purity in a way that reveals something about our natures as sexual beings. Sometimes people will talk to me and say, “Christians are just so hung up on sexual issues and sexual sin. They are hypocrites. They ignore sin over here and they are all about certain sins.” And you know what? Honestly, I think that’s a fair criticism. I think we are as Christians sometimes guilty of that, sometimes very guilty of it. Part of the way we navigate out of that is to start looking at our own lives and our own needs for sexual purity and wholeness and cleanness, and a little less of trying to fix people who aren’t even following Jesus. There is actually a biblical precedent for what I just said, but that’s another sermon for another day.

But, there is a reason scripture gives us this focus on sexual sin as having a certain unique aspect to it. Let me just go to one passage to try to illustrate that. 1 Corinthians 6. The Apostle Paul says this: “Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute...” So, someone is involved in sexual sin. There is a specific context there in Corinthians. I’m not going to unpack all of that right now. Look at this. It’s very important. He “becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’” The two will become one flesh. What he’s doing here is actually quoting the foundational verse of 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.”

Here is what’s interesting. If you want to study the scripture a little deeper, one of the things you’ll find out is that in a discussion on sex, sexuality, adultery, sexual sin, and marriage and divorce, this passage is absolutely foundational. In marriage, husband and wife become one and the act of making love within marriage is a husband and wife becoming one physically. They are joined together. It is a picture. It is an act. It is an embodiment of what marriage is all about and what sex is all about. So when we engage in sexual activity, we are not just engaging in an act of pleasure. We are uniting ourselves. Foundational.

We go back to 1 Corinthians 6. He appeals to that thought: The two will become one flesh, quoting Genesis 2:24. “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee (run) from sexual immorality.” This is a radical statement: “Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”

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I want to say at first read, “I disagree, Paul.” I mean, I can’t disagree with Paul. He is inspired by the Holy Spirit. He’s obviously right. The thief is not unaffected by his stealing. The soul of the liar imports something so that you want to say, “No, all sin affects us on the inside.”

Stay and work to get this because it will really help you understand a lot about how temptation works in our life and the whole debate about sexual identity that’s going on in our culture. He would say, “No, no, no, no. I don’t mean like that. I mean, you are actually joining yourself to someone else. So you are one with that. It’s downright unthinkable that the person who is one with Jesus would take Jesus into that act and become one immorally and illicitly. What he is saying is that it’s blasphemous to even think about.

Now, if we take these two principles together -- eyes connected to eyes, sexual sin impacts us at the core of who we are -- we understand, “Okay, I’m joined to another in a sexual act, but also my heart is being affected even when it’s virtual or just visual.” There is a warning: internal, external – fight it with eternal consequences. Are you tracking with me?

So, it impacts us. I know that this is heavy stuff, but it’s helpful stuff. Okay, principle #3, last one.

III. We overcome by the cross and the Holy Spirit.

This is the real hope, the real power that’s ours in Jesus Christ. We don’t fight this battle in our own strength. We don’t live in condemnation in Jesus Christ. I did some research on pornography. Every once in a while I do this. I got so depressed reading statistics that I said I’m just not going to share it. I mean, we get it. It’s a huge issue. It’s a multibillion dollar industry. It’s wrecking people. It’s wrecking relationships. All the stats are out there. Not just pornography, but cohabitation diminishes success in marriage, and on and on and on. The science, the statistics -- non-Christian, nonspiritual people are putting out data all the time that talks about how this wrecks people.

But I want to do more today than leave you with a sense of guilt or condemnation, or the power of the problem, /because it’s great. I want you to leave today with the power of Jesus Christ rising up in your hearts. No matter who you are and no matter how strong the fight is, Jesus is greater than. And your acceptance with him is not conditioned on your own sexual righteousness, but on Jesus Christ. You’ve got to just get to a place where you accept that as a gift by faith and say, “My hope is in Jesus Christ and nothing else.”

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Paul in Romans 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” This verse and this last point has to flavor everything that’s been said, or I’ve not served you well. As you pray about: How do I fight the battle externally? How do I fight it internally? It’s all carried along by the Spirit of God in the power of the cross and the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. So, I’m not just making rules. Yeah, maybe there are hard steps. Maybe there is accountability. There probably is for many of us. But my hope is in Jesus.

I have five boys and one girl and I talk to my five boys about “relationships and such.” But the conversation is very different. The conversation is about everything involved in a journey of sexual purity. I often, often start this discussion with my sons with this question: Are you spending time with Jesus? Are you receiving the strength of the grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ into your heart on a regular basis? What are you taking into your soul? Are you involved in a local church and in a community of people where life change is happening in relationship and you are hearing the word of God preached to you from your pastor?

Sometimes my sons are saying, “Hey, I streamed on-line!” I bet one of them is streaming right now. I’m talking to you. You say that’s great! But be in a local church. Commit to that local church. Commit. Submit your life. Receive from elders and a pastor there in that local setting so that they can care for your soul. Jesus is offering to us today his grace, his strength. So we leave with no condemnation. We leave in the forgiveness of Christ. But we want to walk in the freedom of Christ, recognizing that that hits us even in an area where we sometimes historically have just been afraid to talk about. Amen? Let me pray for us.