

Faithbook Series: What is the Status of Your Heart

Matthew 5:28-30

March 13, 2011

One night when Marlene first showed me her friends on Facebook I was taken back by some of the pictures I saw that people posted of themselves. Guys and girls both with sexually suggestive pictures. To me it was like they were saying loud and clear I am an easy target to be tempted or to tempt anyone who might be interested. One of the things that really irritates me is when guys or girls dress in a very sexually provocative way and then dangling around their neck is a cross. I don't get it.

We are about to read and hear what Jesus said about lust but before we do, let's not get the wrong idea that according to the Bible, lust and sexuality are the same thing. God created us to have sexual desires and experience sex. I believe according to scripture those desires are to be between a man and a woman within marriage. When Genesis 2:24-25 describes God bringing Adam and Eve together the scripture describes them becoming one flesh alluding to both the approval of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman but also that they become one in spirit. The Bible says they were naked and not ashamed. It's not sexual desires that are the problem; God gave us those desires. Sexual lust is the problem and danger.

So let's read what Jesus himself said about lust. Read Matthew 5:27-30

What is in your heart, matters as much as behavior. V.27-28

In the study of Matthew that we have been having on Wednesdays, we've have been noticing something that Jesus repeats in a portion of the Sermon on the Mount. We repeatedly hear this phrase

including in the beginning of verse 27, **“You have heard it said, ...but I say to you.”** One of the first things those words tell us that we need to understand was that Jesus was raising the bar of ethical and moral standards for living. Actually he was putting the expectation where it really needed to be. He was admitting that the teaching in the past had been one thing, but he was teaching something new.

Jesus taught, “You have heard it said, do not commit adultery, but I say to you everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The previous understanding of the Law of Moses, a person was only guilty of adultery if they committed the actual behavior. The Law emphasized outward behavior.

But Jesus taught that the outward behavior is motivated by your heart. In the religious mind of that time the heart was the command center of the soul and body. **So Jesus emphasized what is in your heart matters as much as the behavior.** When our heart is holding the wrong motivations and desires, in the eyes of Jesus we are already guilty of the action. We know our heart is getting off course when we only ask how far can I go before what I am doing is wrong? Instead our heart should be asking what pleases God? So what is in our hearts matters. Last week we talked about the dangers of anger constantly burning within us. Today the words of Jesus teach that the sin of adultery has occurred when the lust for another is burning in our hearts even without the physical action.

Lust defined v.28

Jesus said if you even lust you are guilty. Let's define what the word lust means. The word lust in the Greek language means to have an evil desire. The words of Jesus apply to a person whether married or not. Lust is a sin because the lustful desire for another person sexually is just all about us. The word lust here implies, a desire that has no regard for them other than the sexual pleasure

and gratification they can bring to us.

The Bible says we're created in God's image but the look of lust doesn't see a person as created in the image of God, just a source of pleasure. **Lust reduces the total value of a person given to them by God.**

Lust's destruction: v.29-30

Our response to lustful desires regardless of what they are about is not to be passive. Look what Jesus says in verses 29-30. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out (figuratively speaking) better than entering hell with your whole body intact. If your right hand cause you to sin, cut it off (figuratively speaking). Look at the strong words of Jesus about better to enter heaven maimed than have your whole body and go to Hell. A clear warning is that God is holy and will not tolerate the soul that will not call its lust to accountability and judgment. The word for hell that Jesus uses is the word for a place outside of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped and burned. But the one overall point being made by this figurative, symbolic language is lust is so destructive, don't tolerate lust living in your heart. Lust is a loosing situation.

Frederick Buechner says, "Lust is the craving for salt by a man who is dying of thirst." Another writer said, "Lust is the athlete's foot of the mind." (Pastor Ed Rowell)

People will suffer, we will suffer. If lust is left unchecked some one is going to pay the price.

This is not a complete list but what do the following names have in common. Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, Tiger Woods, Gov. Samford, Sen. Ensign, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Jimmy Swaggart, Rev. Ted Haggard, and gospel artist Miss Sandy Patti.

They have all had extra-marital affairs. All are people who had power, influence, money and intelligence and they have all fallen to the sin of adultery. All fell to the dangers of lust. But it's not just the famous who fall. Take a look at this video clip.

Show clip: Jeff & Wende - adultery

Illustration: I read about a family, I believe was in California that had a pet Mountain Lion. They had it since it was a cub. They allowed it to roam the house like we would a domestic cat. One day the parents were in another part of the house just for a moment and then returned to either the living room or family room. The parents discovered that the Mountain Lion had attacked, killed and partially devoured their four year old child. Horrific, horrific, sight and story. Gruesome story to use in a sermon isn't it.

But the minister who passed that story along said, that is the way unchecked lust can work in us personally and works in our society. Lust will if left alone will grow and devour what is precious to us.

Our wrongful desires may not be about the sexual issues that Jesus addresses here. Our wrong desires may be about material things, controlling the affairs of others, but left unchecked, they will do great harm and damage. What is that scripture out of 1st Peter that says the devil is like a roaring lion seeking who it may devour. Anyone can fall prey. People more capable than you and I have fallen.

Manage or be managed: v.29-30

So as Christians our lust are not to be just winked at with the attitude of girls and boys will be girls and boys. Wouldn't it be great to ask any of the people I mentioned if they regret what they did? I would hope all would express remorse; not that they just got caught; but they have deep regret. **Someone said sexual sin will always take us further than we intended to play, keep us longer than we intended to stay, and cost more than**

we're willing to pay. (source Pastor Ed Rowell)

Verses 29-30 also contains the principles for us to manage and face our wrongful desires.

1.) Stay alert. Remember this teaching from Jesus was first and foremost aimed at the men he hand picked to be his inner circles of disciples. If Jesus knew the people he hand picked could fall, then certainly can we. Jesus said, “if your right eye or hand causes you to sin...” There needs to be maintained in us a heart that is tender and not callous to God’s leading. Our conscious needs to be open to examining our ways, open to someone who might voice a concern, open to allowing scripture to cause us to pause and question ourselves and our motivation.

2.) Jesus said “tear out and cut off “ meaning take action at the heart of the source. Of course the example he uses here of gouging out the eye and cutting off the hand is an example of hyperbole or over exaggerated language to make a point. Lust is a matter of the heart, the mind. We could lust if we were blind or hand no hands. But take action in removing the influences that make it easier to be led into the wrong desires. Take action to not let the Mountain Lion of lust start prowling around freely our hearts.

3.) Don’t run from your lust by denying they exist. I heard a sound bite the other day which said, **“you cannot conquer what you refuse to confront.”** If you find your being tempted and giving into temptation of sexual lust don’t let shame trap you into covering it up. Pray about your battles openly to God. Go to someone you know will keep your confidence and share your concern and ask for help. But don’t run or deny the battle is there. I have often used quotes and video clips by Pastor Bob Russell who was pastor for over 30 years at southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He writes in his book, When God Builds a Church, how he does not have movie channels like HBO or

Showtime because he knows he can be sexually tempted. A pastor that has accomplished all that he has didn't have to say that in his book but he's a great example of someone who strives not to deny or run from sources of temptation; but rather face them.

In our home we similar practice. We don't have HBO or Showtime. I don't watch pay per-view movies unless Marlene is there. I share my laptop with Marlene so she can see where I go on the internet. There has to be trust but we strive in our marriage to balance trust with accountability. I'll often have her answer my cell phone, or check my voice mail messages. It's not because there is an issue; its our way to make sure there isn't an issue, its our way to make sure the mountain lion of temptation doesn't find it's way in our hearts.

We try strive for transparency and trust. Back in early January I enjoyed following the football playoffs. But one Friday evening I had to go to Walmart and while I was there I noticed they were having sale on their movies for 5.00 a piece. I bought three movies including a movie of Tom Hanks called Charlie Rose's War. I had never seen that movie but heard it had good reviews. It was too late watch it when I got home that night and the next day was Saturday and the playoff doubleheader games were on tv. Marlene said, hey while you're upstairs watching the games, do you care if Granny and I watch the Tom Hanks movie? I said sure go ahead.

I came down stairs doing halftime for a snack and Marlene asked, "Did you ever see that Tom Hanks movie? I said know that's why I bought it. She said well it is filthy, the first scene shows nudity with him in a hot-tub with a bunch of women. I didn't look on the back of the case for the rating because as far as I knew anything Tom Hanks had made hasn't included nudity like the Green Mile or Forrest Gump etc. I said well give it me I'll throw it in the garbage and that is what we did. Whether married or not, have people in your lives that aren't afraid to speak up with concern.

Recently the tsunami tragically struck Japan. Those waves did great damage sweeping anything in their path into destruction and chaos. Any of us can be swept up in lust. Pastor Gordon McDonald once shared a story about an old priest in Ireland who was revered by the members of his church. One day a young lady paid him a compliment about how godly of man she and others in the community perceived him to be. He said, **“Young lady if you could look into my soul you would spit in my face.”** Any of us can fall. If you’re not on Facebook ask around for someone who is, your kids your grandkids, a member and the church and just scan through the postings and pictures and you’ll soon get a reminder of how prevalent the temptation for wrong desires about many things are all around us. This is the first Sunday of Lent. Many people between now and Easter will give up foods or activities to honor the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The words of Jesus call us to go deep, deep within ourselves and look at the status of our hearts and give up the wrong desires that can destroy.

But don’t just focus on what you have to give up. Focus on what the what Jesus has to offer. I haven’t not yet read a story where any man or woman expressed regret for being faithful in their marriage. I have yet heard of a country or rock song where someone took up drinking because they did the right thing.

The message we give our children should not be "Sex is bad; don't do it." Instead we should be sending this message: "Sex between a husband and a wife is awesome, and it's worth waiting for."

The Song of Solomon celebrates the erotic sensual love between a man and his wife. Because it is so explicit, a lot of theologians have tried to turn it into an allegory of Christ and his love for the church. I think it can work for that, but I don't think that's the intent.

It's an honest, no-holds-barred look at the joys of marital sex. Sex was created by God to have an important place in a marriage, and the greater satisfaction you find in your relationship with your spouse, the healthier your marriage will be, and the less likely you will be vulnerable to sexual sin.#

That's what we need to establish in the routines and disciplines and practices of our life. That first barrier of defense is to guard our eyes. Job

31:1 says, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." In many cases you can control what comes into your field of vision. Books, television, movies, websites—they're all things you can eliminate from your vision when they become a temptation.

"Flee from sexual immorality." what scripture is this?

Here is the primary difference between men and women. The first perimeter we discussed, the perimeter of guarding our eyes, is much more vital for men. Men are almost always attracted to a woman first visually. And while women certainly appreciate a good-looking man, in most cases when a woman gets in trouble with lust her first attraction was in the realm of emotions. So women, if you're feeling vulnerable, lonely, unappreciated, or unattractive, and some man who is not your husband treats you with tenderness, kindness, listens to you, appreciates you, or compliments you, you will often feel an attachment to that man. And that attachment can take you places you never wanted to go.

This is not just a sin that pertains to men. In every affair there are always two people involved. Women tend to respond more emotionally; men more visually. Generally speaking, men are attracted to sexual images; women are attracted to romance novels.

They love to read the story, the romance. Generally speaking, on the Internet guys get in trouble with explicit web sites; women get in trouble in chat rooms.###

The third realm of defense is to guard your heart. The psalmist said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." If I give the first part of my day to my first love, to Jesus Christ, it is much easier to keep from falling into lustful habits throughout the rest of the day.