



There is a danger that can lurk in churches like ours. I think we all know it could exist, and so we here seek to be sensitive to this, but the danger can nonetheless exist: it is that we can place such an importance on having right theology and doctrine that we can excuse our sinful practices simply by saying resting on our theological convictions. We, myself included, can sometimes think that as long as we're not engaging in the "big sins," we're fine. We can convince ourselves that we're on good terms with God because we can recite verses and can explain the doctrine of justification. But we all ought to admit that's entirely foolish, right? I can know a lot about my children and not really have a relationship with them. I can know all the details of my wife's week and not love her. I'm reminded of the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13: **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**<sup>1</sup> We can declare many things and have powers, but if we don't have love, in the end, we have *nothing*. Or, as the apostle James says, you can believe the right theology, but the reality is that the demons have right theology, too. Knowing things doesn't mean you actually know and love God. Would you agree? I hope you do agree with this because this one of the issues Jesus addresses in the Sermon on the Mount.

As I stated in previous weeks, Jesus is now at a point in this sermon where he is comparing and contrasting the original intent of God's Law with the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees. What we've already seen is that the scribes and Pharisees merely emphasized the external, and they seemed to focus on temporal consequences, too. In other words, they took God's Law, which was meant to point everyone to their need for God and their need for God to forgive them, and they diminished it. The Law in many ways was used as rules for a better life in the here-and-now. Jesus here reminds all of his listeners (both followers of Jesus and those who are intrigued listeners) that the Law has a two-fold purpose. It is to cause humans to see that their sinners in need of God's forgiveness, and it also holds out encouragement and hope for those who have been rescued by Jesus – because Jesus doesn't only provide for our forgiveness. If you have turned from your sinfulness and turned to Jesus, then God has promised to help you grow in actually obeying God's true intentions of his Law!

So, now we come to the text today on the topic of lust, and we will see how a relationship with Jesus radically transforms how we relate to human beings. Even as I say this, I want to emphasize something that was encouraging me last week. When we remember that Jesus came to fulfill the Law, remember that all the requirements Jesus puts out, he lives by. In other words, if you have a view of the Lord that when you sin, he's sinfully angry against you – that he mocks or rolls his eyes at you – you don't have a right view of God. He loves you dearly. When we come to the text today about lust, I think we can all know God doesn't lust after humans. He's not like Zeus. But the flipside of lust is love. God actually has committed and caring love for the Church of Christ, and God doesn't simply use people like pawns for any type of worldly pleasure. This is the amazing, gracious and loving God we serve. That's why I say that

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 13:1–2.

a relationship with Jesus radically transforms us. As children of God, who are loved by him, our hearts are transformed to want to imitate our God and Savior.

Let's now get to the main idea of the sermon: **Love, not lust, fulfills God's righteous demands.** There are a few things I want to emphasize at this point. First, this sermon is on the topic of lust, but we have many young children here; so, I'm going to try to speak in as much code as possible, but I can't get around everything. Second, I want to explain the wording of the main idea for a moment. You might be wondering why I emphasize love here, and where does "righteous demands" show up in these four verses? Well, let's not forget that we must have context to these verses. In verses 17-20, as Jesus speaks on the need to obey God, he gets to his conclusion: unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. From this point on, Jesus reveals to his disciples what Kingdom living looks like. And, it all falls under the category of righteousness. In other words, to lust is unrighteous. Let me put it another way. In the Scriptures, "righteousness" and "justice" are the same words. That's why we have the word "justification," which means "to declare righteous." It's a legal term. So, to sin is practice injustice. This is what the apostle John says in 1 John, where he says that everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness (see 1 Jn. 3). Sin is lawlessness. Sin is injustice. Lust is unjust.

But what about my statement about love? Nowhere in this text does Jesus actually use the word "love," does he? You're right, but when talking about the true intent of the Law, I think it is only right and appropriate to always remember that the summation of the Law is to love God and to love others. Jesus makes this clear throughout his ministry. So, this morning, while Jesus emphasizes that his Kingdom citizens do not pursue lust and they fight against it, I'm also going to be stating the *positive* command of "love" as well because I think that'll help us in understanding even more *why* God would sentence someone to Hell for lusting.

Let's now get into the text itself. We'll focus on the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees first, and then contrast it with Jesus' teaching.

### **1. The scribes and Pharisees focused on physical actions alone (vv. 27-28).**

Read verses 27-28 with me: <sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>2</sup>

How do we know the religious people of the day were only focused on the physical? Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" Isn't that explicitly what was written in the 10 Commandments? Wasn't it? Yes! So, what's wrong with the scribes and Pharisee's teaching? Well, verse 28 helps us to understand how the religious leaders of the day interpreted this. When Jesus says, "But I say to you that everyone who looks. . .has already committed adultery. . .," he's showing that the religious leaders didn't talk about the internal sin of lust.

To put this in a modern context, we can say to people to not participate in intimate relationships with someone who's not your spouse. If you're not married, do not go to inappropriate clubs. Don't act out physically and fulfill sexual desires. We could go father and say, "Wow, what self-control you have" for not looking up things online or for not picking up the prostitute.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:27–28.

Even more than this, we can think people are very godly simply because they *don't* act out in these ways. We can think they must be examples to us of resisting fleshly impulses. And, I do want to say that I am grateful that people do not act out on all their impulses! Just like I'm grateful if someone were to restrain their anger and *not* murder someone, I'm grateful for when people restrain their lusts and they do not act out. However, when God looks down on humans, he does not say, "Wow! That's great. You're just restraining yourself, but inwardly you're filled with all forms of sexual injustice." That's not God's intention when he says, "Do not commit adultery."

A while back, I came across a statistic on how often pornography is viewed by men. The vast majority of men view pornography regularly in the US, and so many view it for immense lengths of time. For some reason, my mind thought this: When I go into Meijer, the majority of men there are actually perverts. Now, when I say this, you could say, "Pastor Timothy, don't say that! Didn't Jesus say to not call people 'fool'?" Jesus did say that, but the point was the intention of the heart. I'm burdened that we live in a perverse generation where the majority of men are perverse and they're pursuing it. Oh, and by the way, this is not only a male problem. Increasingly, women are engaging more and more into pornography as well. This is not God's intention. God's design is not to create a New Heaven and New Earth that is filled with people who have perverse hearts but they just don't act it out (like the many people in Meijer). Did you know that?

Maybe you're here today and you yourself are hiding in lust. You feel the shame and discouragement, and you feel you can't talk to anyone about it. Maybe you listen to what I'm saying already, and your thought is, "I'm a failure. I'm destined for Hell." But let me say this, "If you're a follower of Christ, Jesus promises to grow you in obedience!" At the cross, Jesus took the punishment for your unjust sexual sin! He took it on himself! Now, Jesus has given you his righteousness, through the Spirit, to live more justly in this world. But, if you're not someone who follows Jesus, then there is a fear. If you do not turn to Jesus then you must take the justice against your unjust sin. As Jesus states in verses 29-30, the punishment and consequence of living in sin is that your body goes to Hell. Why not turn to Jesus and experience cleaning and hope and acceptance? You can even right now. Or, if you have more questions, please talk to me or another Christian. With this, let's get to Jesus' teaching that contrasts with the scribes and Pharisees.

## **2. Jesus, and the Law, focuses on lustful intent (vv. 28-30).**

Let's read verses 28-30 again: But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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.<sup>3</sup>

We hear Jesus' words, and in our tendency to self-justify and not think we're as spiritually bankrupt as he says we are in verse 3, we might say, "What does lustful intent actually mean?" The word for "lust" here can also be translated "covet." So, think of it this way: you want someone's body, so you will take it for your own personal pleasure. You want a physical experience for yourself, so you take it for yourself. To have a lustful intent means to have an "I would do this with another person if I could."

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:28–30.

Now here, I want to explain Jesus' statement. First, Jesus emphasizes "everyone who looks at a woman." Who is Jesus talking to here? And, is Jesus limiting lust only to looking at women? No. This is a general statement. The emphasis is not on whether you look at women or men. And, Jesus' teaching can't be only limited to men here. He's speaking to all of us, men and women.

Second, some people could say, "How is this just as bad to God as actually committing the physical actions?" I love an illustration Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave in one of his sermons. He was trained as a medical doctor, and he said that we must always remember that the Bible says that sin leads to death. It doesn't matter what sin, the trajectory of all sin is *death*. So, he goes on to ask us to imagine we're in a hospital. In one room there is a person who looks like they're struggling for life. It's painfully clear that they are dying. Yet, in another room, there's a person sitting calmly in the bed. That said, they have a deadly disease, too. Lloyd-Jones then says that "It is not the mode but the fact of death that matters. It is not the symptoms that finally count, but the disease" (Lloyd-Jones, *Studies on the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 209). Sin leads to death. Whether you're actively out there in sexual sin, doing all sorts of things, or you're fantasizing internally, the problem of death remains.

It's intriguing to me that Jesus puts lust after anger. Oftentimes in the Old Testament stories and even in movies and books today, we find that violence and sensuality go together. And, just like I would say that we humans have an anger problem, we clearly have a sensuality problem. I don't know the statistics today, but I know about 15 years ago, it was said that the pornographic "industry" in America brought in more money than all the major American sports combined. Billions of dollars are spent because of humans lusts – to feed themselves with things that will never fully satisfy. To feed themselves on people created in God's image.

Through pornography, self-stimulation, TV shows that continually press the envelope to bring in nudity and sensuality to Instagram reels – our society is bombarded with sensuality. You want to feed your lust, you can any time and anywhere. But don't blame the phones. Don't blame computers or other media. As Jesus said elsewhere, it's not what's outside that defiles us. It's what's on the inside. The reason this is so prevalent is because there's a market for it! The human heart longs to lust. Can you relate? I bet you can. I have known people who were drawn in to pornography from early ages – through accidents. The average child today sees pornography for the first time as late elementary to early middle school. (That may be an old statistic.) Oh how burdened I am for hearts that are being shaped and molded by lust. Lust is so praised it seems that people almost cannot think in terms of love anymore. Meaning, if you want to have a physical encounter with someone, that's love. The base desires of lust have, for many people, eclipsed love. I pray that wouldn't be the case for us – for those of us who trust Jesus. If you're caught in this sin, I pray you'd talk to people within the church here and ask for help. We are a people pursuing Jesus together. We want to see greater growth and victory!

But you could be sitting here saying, "Why is lust so bad? Why does Jesus say that a person will be condemned to Hell for lust?" Lust devalues the person. It turns them into an object for consumption, not an individual to serve. We know God's teaching is that the sexual union is to be reserved ONLY within the context of a covenant between a man and a woman. Anything outside of that is lust and fornication. By the way, I've heard of people who say that God doesn't command against sex outside of marriage or even pornography. Just remember that the word for fornication is "porneia." That's the word from which we get our English word pornography. And, this word is understood as anything outside the confines of one man and one woman. Even within marriage, you do not bring other people into the marriage bed relationship. No pornography, no fantasizing that it out of those bounds. Why? Because this all devalues people. This doesn't serve.

When we read of Song of Solomon, you get this picture of sexual union within the confines of love. There is joy and anticipation. In the Proverbs, we're commanded to rejoice in the wife of our youth. We're to not let the sexual desires flow like streams in the street, but to direct our desires toward our spouse. But even within marriage, those desires are to be directed in sacrificial love – not consumeristic pleasure. Men and women, listen carefully, you can lust sinfully even as a married person. If you're not *loving* your spouse, and if you're just treating them as something from which you get sensual pleasure, you're using God's gift of sex for selfish purposes. You do not have love. And, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, if you have not love, you're worthless. All the Law was given in order to love God and love others – including the law to not lust.

**Application.** This is why Jesus then calls his disciples to **take radical action against the sin of lust**. He uses two physical examples here to prove his point. Read verses 29-30 again: <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>

First, notice that Jesus speaks from the perspective of what is better. This is interesting because lust always tempts us to say that it is better. Yet, Jesus says lust isn't better. Lust is worse than God's ways. Do you know that? God's ways are better than lust. And, if you're tempted to doubt that. If you're tempted to doubt that God's ways are better, I want to challenge you to doubt your doubts! Don't doubt God. Doubt your doubts of God! Jesus is explicit here: hell is on the line. It is better to be lame in Heaven than to be able-bodied in Hell!

And, at this moment, you could say, "But I'm justified. I've asked Jesus to forgive me of my sins, so it doesn't matter how I live!" Or, maybe you're so discouraged because you keep failing and falling into sin. You think, "Well, God must be fine with it because I just can't seem to change." Or, maybe you don't treat your sin seriously. It's something that happens, but you think, "Well, everybody sins, so I guess I'm fine, too." I am concerned for you if you embrace any of these lies. Remember Jesus' words in verses 17 and following. Jesus came to fulfill the Law even through his disciples. If you're not actively taking steps forward to obey and follow the Lord, you have reason to doubt your salvation. Jesus isn't saying we're perfect, but he does empower us to be progressing. Hell is *not* something to trifle with. Hell is where the book of Revelation says we will be forever bound to our sins and lusts – and we will experience no satisfaction. The man who longed for the drop of water on his tongue was only expressing one aspect of drought. Hell is filled with complete drought – the ravages of lust and sin will control you and you'll never have one ounce of satisfaction. Instead, the wrath that Jesus took on the cross for myriads of sinners who have turned to him and trusted in him – that wrath awaits you if you decide you do not want God, but you want your ways. Sin always leads to death!

Here you could then say, "Ok, I don't want to go to Hell, so I'll just fight the lust." Hold on! First, Jesus is not preaching acceptance by works. Meaning, God isn't going to say, "Good job, you stopped lusting, I'll forgive you now." No. We should all be humbled by these words of Jesus to cause us to see our spiritual bankruptcy and need for Jesus. It's only because of our acceptance and because of Jesus' empowerment that we then say, "I'm not hell-bound. I'm Heaven-bound. This is my identity; therefore, I'll fight against lust!"

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:29–30.

But what does it mean to fight against lust? Well, Jesus says to gouge out your eye and cut off your hand! Do you think this is literal? I hope not. As I said last week, Jesus speaks hyperbolically in each of these teachings to emphasize his overall point. With reconciliation, the point is that God takes reconciliation seriously. So, while we can be quick to reconcile, the point isn't so much on the speed of reconciliation, but on the desire to see reconciliation. This week, the point is not on gouging physical eyes and cutting off physical hands. If that were the case, Jesus would be contradicting himself. The reality is that you could gouge out both eyes and still lust. You can cut off both hands and still lust. You can remove all limbs and still lust.

So, what does Jesus mean when he calls us to fight against lust? Right here, some people to a host of external examples. They'll say things like, "If you're tempted by how women dress in public, don't go out in public." Or, "If you're tempted by the computer, throw out the computer." Now, I'm not opposed to external actions. That can be very right and appropriate. But listen carefully, we should be people that if we saw someone naked on the streets that we would love them enough to cover them and see that they're cared for. In addition, if we only focus on the external things, then we miss the heart.

Let's remember that the summation of the Law is to love. That means to fight against lust is to fight for love. And to fight against lust is to address our hearts. How do we do this? I just want to give *one* way this morning. The New Testament tells us. Ephesians 5 says, first off, we need to bring our sins to the light. Don't hide your lusts. Open up – not only with God in prayer, but with fellow believers, because the apostle Paul says that whatever comes to the light becomes light! God will transform us as we take the Word of God and apply it in each other's hearts and lives. We need one another to help us go more deep in our hearts because we often resist going deeper when we're just with our own selves. "Pastor Timothy, I can't. I'll be judged!" No. If you stay in the darkness, you'll be judged. "Confess your faults one to another!" And you could say, "That's too hard!" Then, this is probably what's right. To cut off a hand or gouge an eye is hard, too! But please hear me, I (along with the elders), can say that we have seen God's gracious work in many people growing in loving God, loving others, and killing sensual lust in their lives. We would rejoice if God is working in you to kill sin. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. Together, we can crush Satan's work!

Putting all of this together, **As we live loving one another, pursuing Jesus together as men and women, we begin to see how love, not lust fulfills God's demands! We're also given tastes of Heaven's glory where not one hint of lust will ever remain.**

**Now, let me ask you a few questions: Do you know your need for Jesus? Do you need to come to the Light this morning? Are you even a believer in Christ? Whether you're 12 or 85 and experiencing battles against lust, Jesus is the answer. He calls you to himself so that you can know greater life and peace, and so that you can love and not lust.**