“Love That Honors Boundaries”
Matthew 5:27-30

A Sermon Delivered by
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Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.'"

I find it ironic that a single chaplain on Valentine's Day weekend is preaching on adultery. But there you have it. And as we will see throughout our study of Matthew 5:27-30, God's word has relevance for all of us, regardless of our marital status. We'll be taking a look at why affairs happen, dig into this passage and grab some practical advice along the way.

On our snow day on Thursday, I caught a show called Platinum wedding, a reality show that follows the wedding plans of couples who have more money than I'll ever see. One couple's wedding cost over $250,000. The bride's dress weighed 35 pounds and her bouquet weighed 10 pounds. Knowing the amount of gear I wore in Iraq made me wonder if she, on her wedding day, thought she was going into battle. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of couples on their wedding day appear to be joy filled and expect to live happily ever after.

It's an unfortunate reality in our culture that we are not surprised when affairs happen. What is amazing is how much people are willing to pay for it. Love and trust are shattered. Kids lose their parents and are scarred by sorrow and guilt. Families and friends are torn apart. People surrender their careers, their reputations, their homes, their savings, their friends and their relationship with God—all in the pursuit of happiness—happiness that vanishes. It begs the question - Why would someone do that, risk so much to gain so little?

First, you usually don't realize how much sexual sin is going to cost. It's kind of like going on a shopping spree without a budget. You enjoy it for the moment, but then the bill comes and you can't take it back.

Second, sex is a powerful force. Pastor Chip Bell describes this so well, "(Sex) compels people to voluntarily do things that they would never think themselves capable of doing under normal circumstances. The combination of sexual and emotional attraction is an undertow that captures people who are merely wading by the beach, sweeps them out to sea and does everything possible to drown them. Sex is powerful, but also deceptive, because those who are being swept out to sea are willing and excited about going on this adventure into deep water."
Third, sexual sin doesn’t begin with glaring and blatant transgressions. It starts with a glance, then desire moves in. One begins to find him or herself making extra effort to help or spend time with someone and it goes from there. So it starts with something very small and innocent—something that looks so harmless and it easily grows into something more.

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' "
In Exodus and Deuteronomy from which this passage is quoted, adultery is defined as sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married to each other, but adultery could refer to a broader spectrum of sexual sin. The Old Testament law was clear: adultery is wrong.

Matthew 5:28 "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus says adultery is not the only thing to avoid. Jesus also goes for the internal thoughts and motives. If a man undresses a woman with his eyes, then lust is in his heart. By the way, it goes both ways.

The key word in this sentence is “lustfully”. That's not the best translation of the Greek word. The English “lust” is negative and implies sexual connotation—both of which are missing in the Greek word. It simply means, “To desire something or to long for something” and it is strictly a neutral term. In other words, whether desire is good or bad depends entirely on what you are desiring. The Bible uses this same word in other ways:

- Paul “desires to depart” this life and be with Christ.
- Jesus “eagerly desired” to eat the Last Supper with his disciples.
- The prophets in the OT “longed to see” the Messiah.

When Jesus uses this word, it is usually positive. But here it is obvious that he is talking about a desire for a woman that God has placed “off limits”. To desire that woman, Jesus says, is wrong, just as adultery itself is wrong.

There are a few misunderstandings about this verse. So let's take some time to look at what this verse does NOT mean.

First, emotional adultery and physical adultery are not the same thing. Notice that verse 28 doesn’t say “you’ve already had adultery with her"...implying that you might as well go all the way. No, it says “you’ve already had adultery with her in your heart.” What this is saying is that it is not only wrong to consummate an “off limits” relationship, it is also wrong to desire an “off limits” relationship. Both are wrong, both are destructive, but they are not the same.

Second, this does NOT mean that sexual desire itself is wrong. God created sex and He created us to enjoy it within the context of marriage. Unfortunately, throughout history, sometimes
the church has given the world the impression that sex is evil and God is mad at us for somehow figuring it out. He came up with the idea and he wants us to enjoy it within the proper context - marriage. Using God’s gift outside the marriage of one man and one woman violates the purpose for which it was created. Instead of bringing us fulfillment, it brings temporary pleasure and then long-term destruction and heartache.

Proverbs 6

“Do not lust in your heart after her beauty
or let her captivate you with her eyes,
for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread,
and the adulteress preys upon your very life.
Can a man scoop fire into his lap
without his clothes being burned?
A man who commits adultery lacks judgment;
whoever does so destroys himself.”

One of my favorite kids from this congregation made me a Valentine in Sunday School last week. It is a big pink heart with a smaller red heart on it. The two pieces of paper were glued together. If I were to try and separate these two pieces of paper, it wouldn't work. They are glued together. If I was stubborn and tried to do it anyway, I would end up ripping both pieces of paper and inevitably, they would each leave a part of themselves with the other. It would be ruined. God's gift is designed to do just that- to bind together two people- a man and a woman - who are meant to enjoy each other for life. God loves us and wants us to have the best. He provided the framework for this gift so that we could get the maximum enjoyment out of it.

Third, desire in and of itself for an inappropriate relationship is not wrong, but to entertain or nurture that desire is wrong. To be attracted to or even desire a sexual relationship with someone other than your spouse is called temptation. Even Jesus was tempted and he didn't sin. Desire is initially a response, not a choice. It’s what we choose to do because of desire that makes it sinful. That is the point that Jesus is trying to make in this verse. It’s not only the external behavior of adultery that is wrong. It is also wrong to harbor and nourish a secret internal desire for an illicit relationship. Physical adultery is wrong. But so is emotional adultery.

That’s why purity is important—not only purity in actions, but also purity in thoughts. Purity is not a popular word in our culture. We just don't hear it much these days. In verses 29 and 30, Jesus explains just how important it is. Matthew 5:29 "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be
thrown into hell." Notice the parallel thought in the next verse: Matthew 5:30 "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

I'm convinced that if we only had one eye and one hand left, we would still find a way to have inappropriate sexual relationships and desires. What these two verses are saying is that sexual purity in both action and thought is very important. It’s so important that it’s worth sacrificing some otherwise good things if they might lead us to sin.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

God is concerned with all of life. He gave us a tremendous gift. Let's cherish it and protect it as if it was the most prized possession we have, because it is. This applies to everyone, regardless of your marital status. We obey God's command to live a holy life for our protection and for God's glory. If you're single like me, listen, I get it. I know. But if you were to ask every married person here today and get an honest answer, an overwhelming majority of them would say marriage is a lot harder than they expected and being faithful is sometimes a challenge. When we live a life of obedience to the Lord, we create habits that serve us well and lead to lifelong, fulfilling relationships.

For the remainder of our time, I want to offer some ideas for us to consider so we can protect ourselves.

- Desire is an alarm. In each of our warfare communities, there are alarms that warn us to potential danger. Treat desire as one of those alarms and determine what action needs to be taken to avoid an ambush or a collision.

- Recognize you are vulnerable. I would argue that those who think they are not vulnerable are even more so.

- Watch what you put into your mind. Take whatever steps necessary to cut all access to pornography. Who are your friends on Facebook? Is your spouse comfortable with that? What shows do you watch or music do you listen to that might prevent you from living a life of purity?
• Dress thoughtfully. Ladies, c'mon now. Let's help our brothers out. I know, we just want to look good. We want to be desired, but when we show up in revealing clothing, we just create a stumbling block for them. And don't you want a guy who appreciates you for all your worth, not just your...umm, assets?
• Watch your circumstances. One guideline I have for myself is I try to avoid riding alone in a vehicle with a married man who is not my husband. This is not always possible, but when there is another way, I find it. And you think, well, isn't that a little excessive? Remember what I said about sin not starting blatantly? This is one way our spiritual enemy tempts us.
• Think consequences.
• Satisfy each other in marriage. You are God's gift to each other.
• Confide in a trusted, same gender friend. When I've found myself in a consistently tempting situation, I find someone I can trust and ask her to hold me accountable and pray with me. It is amazing how our spiritual enemy's power is diminished when temptation is brought to light.
• Run away. Scripture tells us to flee from temptation. Sometimes we are called to run into battle, but when it comes to tempting situations, run the other direction.
• Rely on God’s Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the [flesh]."

Let me end with this. We dug deep this morning and most of what I shared was not easy to hear, especially for those who have drifted from God's law. Hear me on this- our God knows everything about you, more than you know about yourself and he still loves you. This is not about God's love for you. That's a given. Scripture tells us that when we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We call this grace. We don't deserve it. It is another gift. Grace does not always protect us from the earthly consequences, but when we confess our sins to God, we can find forgiveness, peace and eternal security that are beyond any earthly pleasure. Amen.