

3. Adultery

In Matt 5:27, Jesus elevates the command of the law – “Do not commit adultery” – to the level of the mind, spirit, and heart of a man. *Adultery* is a word that describes sexual immorality and infidelity between married people. Under the Old Testament law, God permitted certain relationships where men might have multiple sexual partners. Whether these partners were multiple wives like David or multiple concubines like Solomon, Moses permitted them and multiple divorces, as expressed in Matt 19:4-8. From the beginning, however, God made one man and one woman to be one flesh. In this passage, Jesus elevates sexual immorality to the level of willful lust. Modern practices of premarital sex and homosexuality receive the harshest censure, along with modern sins of the mind like pornography. Christ broadens the Old Testament sin of adultery (still sinful under the covenant of Christ) to include sexual immorality of every sort.

Sins of Adultery and Sexual Immorality Are Willful and Avoidable.

Matt 5:27-30: 27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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.

A man committing adultery is sinning, and so is a man, looking at a woman lustfully, sinning. This latter sin is as bad as the first, and it is, in fact, the very same thing as the actual adultery. This description by the Lord encompasses every kind of sexual immorality and promiscuity. The law of Christ tolerates no sexual indiscretions.

What then are men and women so tempted to do? They must control their eyes. They must control their touch. At the core of sexual immorality is the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh. If one looks on another lustfully and if one touches another unlawfully, the sin is already committed. Symbolically, the eye and the hand must be controlled to save the entire person from going into hell. Sexual encounters begin with the eye and touch.

Jesus and Paul Tell of The Danger Inherent in Sexual Immorality.

Jesus extended his teaching in Matt 19 after he had forbidden divorce for any reason except sexual immorality. In Matt 19:10-12, Jesus teaching on divorce and remarriage troubled the disciples:

10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Christ expects Christians who are single or divorced to choose to live celibate lives, renouncing marriage and sexual immorality. Broad commands prohibiting sexual immorality find little acceptance in the modern world of indiscriminate sex. People often, and perhaps, even generally, reject the teaching of the gospel on single sex, homosexual sex, or multiple wives following multiple divorces. People who choose these life styles, as they are called, cannot “accept the word” of Christ.

Paul wrote on this same subject leaving no doubt, as to what the truth is. In 1 Cor 5:9-11, he addressed the church directly:

9 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not

associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

The teaching is clear. We are not to associate with those who claim to be Christians and practice these sins, the focus of which is sexually immoral Christians.

As for us, Paul delivers an equally strong command against sexual immorality of any kind in 1 Cor 6:9-10:

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Adultery, single sex, homosexual sex, and pornography are one in the light of the word of Christ.

Sexual Immorality Is a Desecration of the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

In order to commit sexual immorality, people must defile their bodies, overcome the spirit of Christ that dwells within them, and unites with that unlawful sex partner as one flesh. 1 Cor 6:14-19 teaches:

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

Sexual immorality, as no other sin, requires a completed satisfaction of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the vain glory of life. In 1 John 2:16, John wrote, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

Conclusion

Jesus approved the Old Testament law – "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In his law, Jesus strictly forbids sexual immorality, including the sin of looking to lust. The new law specifically condemns contemporary practices. The way of escape is to abstain from these evils. Paul offers a positive approach to these sins of the world in Rom 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Study Questions

1. How does the law of the Old Testament on adultery differ from the law of the New Testament?

2. What must a single or divorced person do to remain true to the word?

3. How are Christians required to treat other Christians who continue in sin? _____
4. What sin is within the body? _____
5. Whose temple is our bodies? _____
6. What will be the fate of those who practice sexual immorality? _____