

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 2 July 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Adultery in the Heart

Matthew 5:27-30

Unless you've been living in a cave all your life, you are well aware of the fact that our modern Western culture is obsessed with sexual immortality. Advertisements are often laced with sexual innuendo. Pop and Rock musicians openly flout their immoral lifestyle in their songs. On radio and television, immorality is discussed casually. The internet is filled with the vilest filth imaginable. Pornography is everywhere (including in our Irish schools, as of this coming autumn). Movies are heavily sprinkled with scenes of nudity and immorality, as well as with lewd language and innuendo. Needless to say, this constant bombardment of sensuality has had a profound impact on people's lives and families. It is now the norm for couples to live together in fornication, without committing themselves to each other in marriage; and adulterous affairs among married people are commonplace.

Now, I wish I could say that Christians have not been defiled by this immoral spirit. However, such is not the case. Probably one of the biggest obstacles to godliness among Christians today is the struggle with lust and sensuality. Our perverse culture has *greatly* affected Christians. A poll done by *Leadership Magazine* about 25 years ago showed that 12% of pastors had committed adultery while in the ministry; and 23% had done something "inappropriate."¹ Around that same time, *Christianity Today* did a poll which revealed that 23% of professing Christian men had committed either fornication or adultery, and 45% had done something that they themselves considered "inappropriate."² Of course, we could dismiss these figures by assuming that many of the professing Christians who participated in this poll were not true Christians. However, as a believer who grew up in church, and who has known the Lord for four decades, I can attest to the fact that I have seen *many* genuine Christians fall into the sin of fornication or adultery; and though they repented, and did their best to get things right, their sin has caused great trouble in their lives, and has marred their testimony for the Lord.

Sadly, most Western churches (even professedly Bible-preaching churches) have a fleshly, "Corinthian" spirit. Personal holiness is not emphasised in the preaching; and sin is swept under the rug. (Talking about sexual sin is uncomfortable and convicting, and doesn't lend itself to "church growth.") Many churches do not discipline its members, even when they are committing open and egregious sexual sin. Because of this hypocrisy, the world doesn't take Christians seriously. Many children who grew up in Christian homes walk away from Christianity, because of the hypocrisy and spiritual powerlessness that they have seen in the churches in which they grew up. Many churches have no power to win the lost, because many of its members are caught in the Venus fly trap of lust.

Every Christian in this room knows what it is like to struggle against the sensuality of our culture. However, there is something that we need to realise: *adultery begins in the heart*. We don't need a perverse culture to defile us, because the defilement comes from within us. As Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, He continually talked about *the spirit* of the Law, instead of the mere letter of the Law; and He constantly focused on the *heart* of man, instead of on mere outward conformity. In the past couple messages, we have seen that *anger* in the heart is, in God's eyes, the same as murder; and this

morning, we will see that *lust* in the heart is, in God's eyes, like the actual act of adultery. The title of this message is *Adultery in the Heart*.

Read Matthew 5:27-30.

I. The source of adultery—the heart (vv. 27-28)

In **1 Samuel 16**, we find the account of when God chose David, the son of Jesse, to be the next king of Israel. Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, was called to stand before the prophet Samuel; but God did not choose Eliab as king (even though *Samuel* thought that he looked like "king material"). God told Samuel, "**Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.**" Six more of Jesse's sons were called before Samuel; but God refused each of them, as well. Finally, David, the youngest of Jesse's eight sons, was brought from the sheep pasture to stand before Samuel: and God told Samuel, "**Arise, anoint him, for this is he.**" Samuel obeyed the LORD, and anointed David as the next king of Israel; and from that day forward, David was indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Now, remember—it was not the norm for an Old Testament believer to be *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, as believers are today; thus, this was an incredible privilege. David already had a very close walk with the LORD; but now, with the Holy Spirit living *within* him (and not merely *near* him), his spiritual understanding, and his communion with God, were elevated to a whole new level. Israel was filled with the heavenly music that flowed from the pen and the harp of "the sweet psalmist of Israel." To this day, our hearts are still stirred and elevated as we read the psalms of David, which God gave to him by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, David was far from perfect. He still had a sinful heart, just like everyone else. To walk in right communion with God, he had to do what every believer of every age has had to do: he had to *surrender* himself to God. Even with the Holy Spirit living within him, there were times when he allowed his faith to buckle under the intense pressure of fleeing from King Saul, or of being oppressed by some other enemy. David did often fail; but when he failed, he quickly recognised his sin, and confessed it, and walked with the Lord again.

For the better part of his life, David stayed surrendered to God, and walked in obedience to the *new heart* that the Spirit of God had created in him. *Except*, that is, for a period of nine to ten months, during the twentieth year of his reign. It all began on a night when he walked out onto the roof of his palace, and looked out over the housetops of Jerusalem.

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-4.

The instant when David saw Bathsheba, he should have turned around, and gone back into his chamber; and he should have prayed to God for help to remove that scene from his mind, and to keep him from going back out for a second look. But he didn't. He continued to look, and to stare in lust. At that moment, David forgot about God. He didn't feel *hatred* for God: he simply forgot about Him; and he forgot about His holy calling. The burning, sinful desires of the flesh were now in control. Even David's servants seemed to be putting forth a gentle rebuke to David when he asked who the woman was. The servant's question, "***Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?***", sounded like a subtle rebuke and warning. Even *the servants* seemed to be saying, "Uuum, you do realise that this woman is *married*, and that *you* are married...right?" However, at this point, David wasn't heeding any warnings, because the old, sinful heart was in control. Undoubtedly, he tried to rationalise what he was about to do. (When you are controlled by lust, your mind has *infinite* ability to rationalise anything!) Perhaps he reasoned that his own wives weren't giving him the love and support that he needed lately. Perhaps he thought about the strained relationship between himself and his first wife, Michal, or about the merely "political" marriages to some of his other wives, and reasoned that he deserved *true* love. Perhaps he reasoned that Uriah, though a good soldier, wasn't very "romantic," and that Bathsheba needed some "comfort," since her husband was voluntarily away on military missions for long stretches of time. Perhaps he even reasoned that he was doing Uriah a *favour* by comforting his lonely wife. Perhaps he reasoned that this was "love," and not lust, since this woman wasn't a prostitute in the street, but the wife of a respectable soldier. And besides, as long as he could keep this secret, no one would be hurt. Any convicting thoughts from the Holy Spirit were squelched. After all, he had served the Lord faithfully for many years; and surely God wouldn't object to his having a little fun, just once. Having justified his sin in his mind, David sent his messengers to bring Bathsheba to him; and he fell into horrible sin. Now, the day finally came when David was confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan, and he deeply and sincerely repented; but for *nine long months* before that day, he hypocritically went to the Temple, and made sacrifices to God, and went through all the outward forms and ceremonies of the Law. All the time, he was in an adulterous relationship with another man's wife; and worst of all, he ended up *murdering* Uriah by the hand of the Ammonites in order to cover up his sin.

Now, what was the real source of David's adultery? What was the real problem? Was it the scene of Bathsheba bathing, which he had unwittingly stumbled upon? Did that scene defile his heart, and make it impossible for him to resist temptation? No! The defilement came from *within*—from *his own heart!* David *could* have yielded to God, closed his eyes, turned away, and asked God to put his old, sinful heart to death: and God would have heard his prayer, and helped him to overcome temptation. Tragically, though, that is not what David did. He allowed his old, rotten, sinful heart to spring to life, and to seize his will. In his *heart*, he was already committing adultery; and very soon, what was in his heart became reality.

As Jesus spoke on this matter of adultery, He was speaking to an audience that was well acquainted with the Law. They had heard the words of **Exodus 20:14** and **Deuteronomy 5:18** all their lives: "*Lo tin'aph*" ("***Thou shalt not commit adultery***"). They knew these words well. Yet, most people were content that *outwardly* keeping this command was good enough—that as long as they didn't commit actual adultery, they were O.K. with God. However,

Jesus, the Author of the Law, had gone straight to the *heart* of the Law, and had explained the *real* meaning of **Exodus 20:14**. To those who desired to be *His* disciple, a whole new way of thinking was required. If there were any in the audience who had *not* yet truly repented of their sin and believed in Him, Jesus wanted them to know that superficial righteousness wasn't enough. They would have to ditch the idea that "Adultery is bad, but inward lust isn't so bad, as long as you're not hurting anyone." To be saved, they would have to *turn from their sin*, and come to Him with a hunger and thirst for *true righteousness*.

Folks, I'm not trying to cause any true believer to doubt his salvation: but if you claim to be a Christian, yet you have always freely indulged in adulterous thoughts, and you have never thought that you were doing wrong, since you weren't "hurting anyone", perhaps you need to consider whether you have truly been saved. Paul warned the fleshly, carnal church members in Corinth, "**Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.**" Make sure that you have truly repented of your sin, and placed your faith in Jesus!

A true citizen of the Kingdom desires righteousness: and when he is *not* living righteously, he is absolutely miserable! If you are saved, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Before you were saved, sin didn't bother you; but now, you can't sin and get away with it. The Holy Spirit won't *let* you get away with it! He convicts you until you *surrender*. Daily surrender to God is the mark of a true believer, and a requirement for every citizen of the Kingdom. Why is it so necessary? Because our old hearts are incurably evil; and without continual surrender to God, the old heart will be in control. Our old hearts don't need to be "defiled" from the outside, because they are already defiled on the *inside*.

Read Mark 7:14-23.

Did you notice that "**adulteries**" was number two in this list of wicked things that our hearts produce—and that it comes right after "**evil thoughts**"? That's not a coincidence! Adultery is the product of the "evil thoughts" of our hearts. We can try to rationalise our impure thoughts all we want; but the reality is that by committing adultery in the mind, we are despising God.

II. The remedy for adultery in the heart (vv. 29-30)

Perhaps, by now, you are feeling a little scared—even though you know that you have received Christ as your Saviour. If so, that's a good thing! We *should* be scared of our own sinful nature! We *shouldn't* trust our hearts! Yet, what is the remedy to this problem of "adultery in the heart"? Well, let's read **verse 29** and **30** again, and see what Jesus said. **(Read verses 29 and 30 again.)**

At first glance, Jesus' remedy to the problem of lust almost seems beyond belief. Pluck out your right eye? Cut off your right hand? Does Jesus really mean this? To those who don't know the Lord, and who don't have spiritual understanding, verses such as these have always been a mystery. For example, in the year 1529, an English Catholic priest named **Prior Buckenham** preached a sermon in which he *condemned* the translation of the Bible into English; and his reasoning was that "If the common man read the Scripture, he will destroy himself." In regard to Jesus' words here in **Matthew 5:29**, he said, "When the simple man reads the words 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee,' incontinent, he will pluck out his eyes, and so the whole realm will be full of blind men, to the great decay of the nation, and the manifest loss of the king's grace. And thus, by reading of Holy Scriptures, will the whole kingdom be in confusion (Demaus, Life of Latimer, p. 77.)"³ Obviously, Prior Buckenham himself did not really understand the Scriptures, and didn't think that *anyone else* (especially those simple "common people") could understand it, either; and instead of taking heed to the Scripture, he hated and feared it, and tried to suppress it.

The lost world is mystified by verses such as these: but we who are saved have the Holy Spirit to teach us the Word; and through the Spirit, we are able to understand all things that God has revealed to us. What *does* Jesus mean, then? Well, we know that Jesus isn't talking about *literally* plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand, because He has already told us the real source of the problem—and it *isn't* the eye or the hand! The real source of the problem is the *heart!* You may literally pluck out your eye if you wish: but that won't stop the heart's desire for adultery. You could even cut out *both* eyes; and though you would not have to deal with seeing nudity anymore, it *still* wouldn't keep your heart from desiring evil.

Clearly, Jesus was not speaking literally. He was saying, "Do whatever it takes to 'cut off' anything in your life that could lure you into sin"; and He was using the most extreme language possible to drive home the seriousness of the command. The Apostle Paul put it this way: "***But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*** [in other words, "put on" the garment of the new nature every day], ***and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.***"

How, then, do we "***make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof***"? There are a number of resources at our disposal. First of all, there is the resource of **prayer**.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16.

Brethren, we *must* take time every day to pray over our weaknesses. We need the Lord's help! Since we men are highly prone to visual lust, this should be high on our prayer list (especially at this time of year, when women are going around half naked)! Sisters, you need prayer, too. For women, adultery in the heart springs up mostly through *emotional* attachments; and this must be guarded against just as vigourously as men must guard against *visual* lust. (In fact, emotional attachments must be guarded against with *extra* vigour, since they develop slowly and insidiously!) Paul urges us to go to the throne boldly, that we may "***find grace to help in***

time of need.” The “*time of need*” is not at some pre-planned time of day, when you have time to sit down and pray. No, it should be *immediately*. The instant when a wrong thought arises in your heart, go to God in prayer, and ask Him to help you cast down that thought.

Another resource that we have is **Scripture memorisation**. Hiding God’s Word in your heart is a powerful antidote to temptation! Jesus quoted Scripture every time Satan tempted Him. We, likewise, should have a ready treasure trove of Scripture to pull from the vault of the new heart that Christ has given us. **Psalm 119:9** says, “*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*” **Psalm 119:11** says, “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*” What kind of Scripture should we memorise? *All kinds* of Scripture! *All* Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. We should memorise Scripture about the Person of Jesus Christ. We should memorise Scripture that teaches us about the nature of man, and the nature of sin. We should memorise Scripture that talks about justification, and sanctification. We should memorise Scriptures such as **1 Thessalonians 4:3-4**, which says, “*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.*”

Scripture memorisation is part and parcel of the **discipline of the mind**. The Apostle Peter wrote, “*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober.*” Your mind is the battle ground; and a mind that is left unguarded will quickly be seized by the enemy. Ladies, if you really desire to guard your mind against emotional attachments, then you’d better not even *think* of watching “Coronation Street,” or any other trashy soap opera. The devil will mess up your mind for sure! Men, if you really desire to keep your mind pure, then you must do as Job did, and make a “covenant with your eyes.” In **Job 31:1**, Job said, “*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*” The mental “covenant” that Job made with his eyes forbade him to engage in a “second look.” Men, treat every woman you meet with dignity and purity, as though she were your own mother or sister. Even if the women around you dress immodestly, discipline yourself to look them in the eyes--and nowhere else! By the way, ladies, please help the men out in that regard, and dress modestly! Keep the collar line very high, the skirt line very low, and all your clothing loose, and not tight! Don’t let anyone persuade you that having a high standard of dress is “Victorian,” or “puritanical.” It’s *biblical*. God wants all of us (both men *and* women) to cover up, so that we can help others to keep their minds pure. The *heart* is the source of evil; but the *eye* is the gate by which our evil hearts import fuel for consumption!

Read Luke 11:33-36.

Whenever we take our eyes fully off the Lord, our lives begin to be filled with darkness. Not only is our testimony hidden from others, but we ourselves begin to think and act as we did before we were saved, when our lives were completely filled with spiritual darkness. If our eye be “*single*” (singly focused on the Lord), then our “*whole body*” will be filled with

“light.” However, if our eye be **“evil”** (focused on something of this world, instead of on Christ), then we will be filled with **“darkness.”** To put it simply, we cannot have “conflicting interests” in our lives. A person who runs for a public office cannot have an affiliation with an organisation which would sway his votes or decisions, because this would make him “compromised.” Likewise, we, as God’s people, cannot have a “conflicting interest” in fleshly things of this world, which are opposed to the Law of our Master. Our eye *must* be wholly focused on Him, on His kingdom, and His righteousness. A believer *can* fluctuate between being filled with spiritual light and spiritual darkness; but when we are in this spiritual state, we are not effective for Christ, because we are unstable, and “double-minded.” Christ wants our **“whole body”** to be flooded with spiritual light, with **“no part dark”!** Christian, don’t let your life be partly filled with darkness. Keep your eye on Christ and His Word, and don’t let the fleshly, sexual things of this world distract your gaze from Him! You cannot be filled with thoughts of adultery, and thoughts of love for Christ, at the same time!

A very practical weapon that we can use in our battle against adultery of the heart is **accountability.** If you are married, your wife should be your number one accountability partner! If you resent your wife’s looking through your phone calls, or looking at the history of what you’ve clicked on the internet, there is a serious problem: and it’s *not* on her end! Either you are hiding something; or, you have no idea how wicked your own heart is, and how desperately you need accountability! Don’t say, “My wife should trust me!” Rather, think, “I shouldn’t trust myself!” If you must, install an app such as “Covenant Eyes,” which enables your wife to see every web site or Facebook page that you look up on your phone, and *vice versa.* If you are unmarried, and you are struggling with purity, it is good to have an “accountability partner” of your own gender—someone who is older, and mature in the Lord. You can establish mutual accountability; and he (or she) can be brutally honest with you! **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10** says, **“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”** If you must have an accountability partner to help you, then do it: but whatever you do, guard your heart!

Read Proverbs 4:23-27.

In this verse, the word **“keep”** means “guard”; and the phrase **“with all diligence”** literally means “with all guards” (as in, “prison guards”). Solomon is instructing us to guard our hearts with every possible kind of “guard,” and to do so with a military doggedness! The Bible gives us many “guards”--such as keeping our eyes; keeping our tongues; and keeping our feet. The old children's Sunday School song “Oh, Be Careful Little Eyes What You See” (along with its follow-up verses, “Oh be careful little hands what you do,” “Be careful little feet where you go,” etc.) isn't just a children's song; it is biblical exhortation, which every child of God should take with deadly seriousness. Sadly, many Christians have brought great sorrow upon themselves because they didn't heed the exhortation of that little “children's song.” Don’t fool yourself into thinking that it's “just a little look”; or that I'm “just passing by” this way; or that “my worldly friends can't change me”; or that I am “just informing myself” about the evil things that are going on around me. Paul said that we should be **“wise unto that which is**

good, and simple concerning evil.” Proverbs 22:3 says, *“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.”* If you *know* that that Hollywood movie could contain nudity, or sexual innuendo, or a drama that involves unfaithfulness (and, let’s face it—the possibility of that being the case is at least 99.9999%), then why would you think of going near the cinema? Folks, God commands us to be separate from sin, and to stay far away from the very appearance of evil. If you must keep a strict system of accountability with your spouse, do it. If you must install some kind of an “eye guard” system, do it. If you must take a sledgehammer to your telly, or to your desktop, do it. If you must entirely stay away from a section of the grocery, from an entire shop or bookstore, or even from an entire street, do it!

Folks, we need self-imposed hedges of protection! **For one thing, we must guard our speech.** Discipline of the mind is directly connected to discipline of the tongue. The things we talk about are the things that we have taken into our minds and hearts. Jesus said, *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”*

Read Ephesians 5:1-12.

Brethren, we must be very careful about what we talk about. The world laughs and jokes about immorality; but such a thing should be unspeakable to God’s people. However, it goes deeper than that. Men, do not talk about deep, personal problems, or bare your heart, to a woman who is not your wife; and ladies, don’t talk about deep, personal things to a man who is not your husband. This easily leads to affairs! Do not allow yourself to be alone with someone who is not your spouse. If someone is offended and says, “Don’t you trust me?”, your response should be, “No, the problem is that I don’t trust myself!” When my wife and I were courting, we were not alone. Someone was always with us. This isn’t “Victorian” or “prudish”; it is based on the biblical principle that *“the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

One last area which we must guard is our touch. **First Corinthians 7:1** says, *“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”* In our culture, of course, a brief handshake is appropriate; but otherwise, keep your hands off the opposite sex—except, of course, for your spouse, if you are married! If you are married, there should be *lots* of touching going on, regularly! In fact, if you are *withholding* that aspect of marriage from your spouse, you are sinning against God. You are opening the door wide to temptation—both to yourself, and to your spouse. King Solomon admonished his son Rehoboam, *“Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love.”* Husband, continually lavish your wife with the kisses, hugs, and emotional support that and she needs; and wives, continually nourish your husband with the physical and emotional love that he needs, so that he will not even begin to think of drinking from another well!

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9.

As citizens of the Kingdom, we must be real with ourselves! If you think “I would *never* do this,” you are on dangerous ground! If a righteous man like King David fell, you can fall, too. Guard your heart! By God’s divine empowerment, be a man, or a woman, of purity.

Conclusion: When confronted with the sin of adultery, Joseph said, “*How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” Joseph knew that “*The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth.*” We cannot hide *adulterous thoughts* from God any more than we can hide the *physical act* of adultery from Him. Christian, should you be messing around with lustful thoughts, you are playing with fire. By God’s grace, do whatever you must do to cut off that sin from your life, so that you can serve the Lord! If you are not sure that you are even saved, please don’t neglect God’s gift of salvation! Hell is *real*; and it is *forever*! Hell is filled with adulterers who never repented of their sin, because they thought that it wasn’t a big deal. **Hebrews 13:4** says, “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers (fornicators) and adulterers God will judge.*” The Judgment is coming, and you *must* be ready for it. The only way you will stand on that day is to be covered with the precious blood of Jesus. Stop playing games! Repent of your sin, and believe on Jesus today!

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publications, 2001), p. 22.

² *Ibid.*

³ Tyndale Monument North Nibley, <https://www.northnibley.org.uk/monument.php>