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Murder and Adultery (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg tackles the controversial topics of murder and adultery, arguing that both should be avoided even in their subtle forms. He argues that although the Sanhedrin and Roman laws may not put someone to death for simply being angry, there are still consequences for negative attitudes and hurtful words. Gregg also emphasizes the importance of exclusive sexual access within a marriage, commenting that lustful thoughts and actions are a breach of the sanctity of marriage. In this way, Gregg shows how God is concerned with justice in all aspects of human behavior.

Transcript

But the point I'm making here is there is some, whether the right text contains it or not, the inclusion of the concept I think is legitimate. There are times when it is right to be angry. Jesus himself is a good example of that.

Paul exhibits anger at times in his epistles, especially in Galatians, for the Judaizers. And God himself in heaven is angry. And remember, what is moral or immoral is based very much on what is God like.

God is angry when there is right reason to be angry. He's never angry when there's not right to be. And he's also very slow to anger, the Bible says.

God is slow to wrath. So to be like him, we must be slow to wrath. And if we ever become angry, there should be manifestly excellent cause.

And I think there's never cause to be angry for the Christian to people who affront us, people who do something to me. And the reason is because I've done so many crimes against God that he has absorbed and forgiven that I am somewhat under obligation to absorb and forgive every manner of crime against myself. The things that Jesus got angry about were not when people did anything wrong to him.

He absorbed every injury to himself and forgave those who crucified him. But he was angry toward those who afflicted others, toward those who misrepresented God in the name of God, and toward those who were exploitive and oppressive and so forth of

others. That kind of stuff got Jesus angry, and I don't think there's any sin in a Christian being angry about such things too.

But it's an anger not motivated by a personal hurtness, a hurt pride or whatever on our part. It can only be motivated on love for the oppressed. And because you love the oppressed, you get angry when you see oppression against them.

That's what motivated Jesus' anger, and that was with a cause. But to be angry without some legitimate cause, at least like that, is sin. Now, I'm making a big deal about this without a cause for a reason.

Because I've suggested to you that what Jesus is amplifying on here is the whole question of justice. There is no injustice in being angry when there's a good cause for it. But there is an injustice in being angry at someone when you don't really have a good cause for it.

And therefore, what Jesus says is, the person may be in fact subject to great penalties who murders because he kills without a cause, without just cause. That's what murder is, is killing without a just cause. That person who kills without a just cause may be in fact subject to great penalties, but I want you to know that as far as God's concerned, those who are angry without a just cause, or who does anything without a just cause, who is, in other words, not governed by justice, that person is in danger of the same.

John, your hand was up a little earlier, so was Corey's. Did I cover, or do you want to say something? Okay, thanks. Corey, did you have your hand up? Right.

Okay. For the sake of the tape, since they may not have heard it, I've said earlier in the year, and I affirm now, that I personally don't think a Christian should be an executioner. But why not? If capital punishment is an act of justice, why not? Another principle comes into play in my thinking on that, and that is that there is a vocational calling of the Christian that is different than the vocational calling of the world.

And that God has two institutions for upholding righteousness on the earth. One is the state, and one is the church. And that the state, according to scripture, is God's executioner of vengeance on those who do evil.

And therefore, the state should do such things as execute people who deserve it, and penalize criminals in general. Whereas the church is God's agency of reconciliation to sinners. And while, you know, many people would feel like this is inconsistent, and that it basically has a double standard of morality, which of course we cannot allow that there is a double standard of morality.

They say, well, how can it be wrong for a Christian to do what is right for somebody else to do, let's say for the state to do? And what if the Christian holds an office in the state as executioner? Well, on that second question, it gets very tangled. I have a hard time

knowing exactly what to say about Christians in that position. And it would take too much time for me to explore it, and I wouldn't reach a conclusion even after spending a great deal of time exploring it, I'm afraid.

I've thought about it a great deal. But I will say this, that it is not at all inconsistent to say that a course of action or a behavior is right for one person to do and not right for another. For example, it's considered to be right for a policeman to go after a criminal and have a shootout with him and shoot him down if necessary.

It's not considered for the average citizen to go out and do those kinds of things. For the court to punish evil doers, criminals, it's considered to be right because the court's authorized to do that. For the average citizen to go out and be a vigilante, it's considered to be wrong.

Or to take another example, and I've given this in the past, that for a man to sleep with a woman, it is right if she's his wife, but wrong, the same action is wrong if she's another man's wife. Sleeping with a woman is the same action, but the question is who's authorized to do it and who's not authorized to do it. Who has God said should do this particular action and who has God said should not do this particular action? So in a sense, to sleep with my wife is a moral thing for me to do, but it would be an immoral thing for any of you to do, and it's the same action.

It's simply that God has authorized me to have a special relationship with my wife, but he hasn't authorized me to have a special relationship with any other wife. So this is what it boils down to. That which is the same action can be right for one party if they're authorized by God to do it, and wrong for another who is not authorized to do it.

And that is what I consider to be the reason that I would find problems with a Christian being an executioner. At least I would have a problem being one myself. Not that execution of criminals is wrong, but it's sort of a vocational difference.

It's sort of a conflict of interest in a sense. I mean, the first concern of the Christian is to get every sinner saved. The concern of the state is not that, but to get them out of circulation, you know.

And you could definitely be caught up in a conflict of interest if you were involved in police work or an executioner or in some government positions, I think, if you're a Christian. Now, this does not mean that I do not acknowledge there are good Christian cops. I know some Christian policemen who are devoted to Christ.

How they settle these matters is their business between them and God. But I personally would see that as, in my life at least, involving a conflict of interest if I was involved in trying to punish sinners as well as forgive them. Anyway, we could go on on that probably.

But the point I want to make here is that I believe that Jesus, in the three illustrations he gives after saying about murder, a lot of them have nothing to do directly with murder. But they do all have something in common. They have to do with justice and being concerned about justice.

And, you know, if it's wrong to kill without a good cause, it's also wrong, though maybe not as extremely so, but it's also wrong to be angry without a cause or to have any ill will toward your neighbor without a cause. Now, the way Jesus puts it in verse 22 is difficult. He says, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment.

Whoever says to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council. And whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Is there an ascending degree of intensity here with each statement? Or is he simply amplified on it? It's very difficult.

The wording is very difficult and many have struggled with it. I have never really settled it myself why Jesus said it quite this way. But it occurs to me that judgment, when it says, you shall not murder, whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.

In verse 21, the judgment there means the magistrates or the government of judgment. In the case of Jesus' people, it would be the Sanhedrin or the Roman officials. Now, when he says, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment, of course, that isn't exactly true in terms of the magistrates.

The Sanhedrin would not put a man to death or even necessarily penalize him just for being angry. Nor would the Romans. But the man who's angry is in danger because anger is a motivation to evil behavior.

He's in danger. He may not be subject just from being angry. He may not be breaking any laws, but he's in danger of judgment because anger can lead him to such things as violence, even murder, if he happens to lose his cool.

And furthermore, the judgment is not simply that of the magistrates and the council. He says, whoever says, racket to his brother should be in danger of the council. That would be the Sanhedrin.

But he says, whoever says you fool should be in danger of hellfire. And I think there's some parallels here intended. I've written in the margin of my Bible something that that was an attempt to analyze the structure of this statement.

Maybe I could tell you how it works. If you made two columns and put angry in the first column and right across from it with an arrow pointing to it, the word judgment and then under the word angry, the word racket just directly under the word angry racket. And just under the word judgment, the word council with an arrow pointing from racket to council.

And then under rocket put fool and under council you put hellfire with an arrow pointing from fool to hellfire. You've done that or if you can picture that, you'll see that you have three items in two columns. In the first column, you have the act.

And in the second column, the consequence. Jesus said whoever's angry will be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says rocket to his brother is in danger of the council.

Whoever says fool is in danger of hellfire. Now you can see that graphically if you've written this out the way I said. Now, if you look at that little paradigm, you'll notice that judgment probably is parallel with council.

Judgment probably means the magistrates or the Sanhedrin, those who enforce the laws. Whereas raka is almost certainly parallel to fool. There's very little difference in the meaning of the two words.

Raka is an Aramaic word that means something like an empty-headed person or a worthless person. And fool has very much the same idea implied. So in a sense, there's a parallel between judgment and council as consequences of acts.

And also between raka and fool. Now, if you could see how the statement progresses, this may not unpack it of all of its meaning. But he's saying if you're angry at your brother without a cause, you're in danger of the judgment.

That judgment is the council, the Sanhedrin. And even if you say an evil word against him, it's the same as being angry. And you're guilty, in danger of the same thing.

In fact, if you say an evil word against your brother, you're in danger of more than just the council. You're in danger of hellfire. There's a progression there, it would seem.

If you murder, you're in danger of the judgment. But if you're just angry, you're in danger of the judgment. In fact, if you just say raka, you're in danger of the judgment.

In fact, if you say something equivalent to raka, like fool, you're in danger of more than just the judgment of man, but you're in danger of the judgment of hellfire as well. Now, that doesn't solve all the problems, and maybe that doesn't solve any of them for you. To me, that little paradigm helps me to see how the thought progresses.

But raka and fool, we shouldn't look for some kind of hairline difference in the meaning of raka and fool. Why would raka put a man in danger of the council, and fool saying that would make him in danger of hellfire? What's so much worse about saying fool than raka and so forth? I think the whole issue here is to be angry and verbally abusive to your neighbor, to your brother, to call him insulting names, to lash out verbally at him. Even if you don't murder him with violence, with physical violence, yet to have murderous intent and speak such evil things against him exhibits the same kind of attitude of a murderer.

And if you do these things without cause, you are simply violating the matter of justice. It's just like killing a person without a cause. It's not just like, and I shouldn't say that, because killing a person without a cause is worse.

And killing a person is worse because it involves the previous and adds something to it. That is, killing a person, you're first angry with them first. If you're not angry with them, then it's an accidental killing.

If you kill a man on purpose, it's because you're angry and hateful toward him. And, you know, obviously it doesn't make sense to say, well, anger is just the same as murder. Therefore, if I'm angry, I might as well kill the guy because it's no different.

Well, it is different, because angry is sin, and murder is an additional sin. It's adding sin to sin. It's two sins, not just one.

It is worse. And, of course, anger is the kind of thing that, although I'm not sure exactly how Jesus meant this when he said, man who says rock will be in danger of the Sanhedrin, I'm not sure in what sense he would. There was not actually a law against it.

But certainly Jesus is saying that in God's book, a man ought to be subject to the penalty of law as much for these motivations and behaviors that are akin to murder, although they're of a lesser degree, as he is subject to sanctions for murder. Why? Because all of them represent a lack of justice, a lack of concern for justice. Now, the next two illustrations in verse 23 and 24 is one of them, and 25 and 26 is the other, are very clearly focused on the issue of justice.

Verse 23 says, therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come offer your gift. Now, Jesus doesn't specify what it is your brother has against you, but that he has something against you does imply you've done something to him.

He's holding a grudge against you. He at least perceives you as having wronged him. Now, maybe you have, maybe you haven't.

But he thinks you have. And if he feels wrong, there's a sense in which as far as he's concerned, he is wrong. And there's a good possibility that Jesus is implying you really have wronged your brother.

I mean, after all, his disciples weren't exactly perfect men. There no doubt were many instances in their past that they could recall if they'd just take a moment, where they had done some actual wrong to someone. Now, he says, if you come to worship God, and that's what bringing a gift to the altar means, is just offering worship to God.

If you come to worship God and you remember that you've wronged somebody and he's

holding it against you, that means your relationship is broken by you having done some injustice that he's holding against you. You go and make it right first before you offer your gift to God, which suggests that God is not going to pay attention or attribute any value to your worship of him if you are knowingly neglecting to love your brother and to do what's just and right by him. The fact that he's got something against you, the implication is you've done some injustice to him and you need to go and make it just.

You need to go make reconciliation by what? Well, the most common way, the most common thing that people have against each other is unpaid bills, unpaid debts or whatever. And so what would be the just thing? How do you make it right? You go pay your debt. You go pay him off.

You do something real mundane like that before you go and do something heavenly like worship God. It might not seem real spiritual to just pay your debts and pay your bills, but that's the most common way, that is, lack of payment of such, which is the most common way to get your brother to have something against you. And it's an amazing thing to think that you may come and speak in tongues and sing songs and worship God with your hands in the air and dance before the Lord, and he may not be paying any attention whatsoever, or worse, he may be paying negative attention.

He may not like it at all because of the injustice that he knows you are ignoring, that you've committed against someone and you've done nothing to remedy it. If you look at Isaiah chapter 1, we see this is exactly what God says his opinion was of the Jews of Isaiah's time, that they were offering their sacrifice to God, they were offering their worship, but they were unjust to each other and therefore he hated their worship. He wouldn't hear it.

He says in Isaiah 1.10, Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom, he means Jerusalem. Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. Those cities were long gone by this time, he's referring to Jerusalem by those terms.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and of fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand to trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices, incenses and abomination to me.

The new moons, the Sabbaths and the calling of the Assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates, they are a trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them.

Why? When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. For your hands are full of blood, that is of unrighteous bloodshed.

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice. The problem here is the lack of justice.

And because they were behaving unjustly toward their fellow man, God was appalled by their worship. Their incenses they offered, the sacrifices they offered, their prayers. He would not pay attention to them.

He said, they are abhorrent to me, I am weary of them. Why? Not because you are not doing it right, but because it is what you are doing when you are not praying. It is that injustice, that wrong dealing between you and your brother.

You have got this blood on your hands. And same thing Jesus says here. Do not even offer your gift to God until you have gone and made right what you have done wrong to your brother.

That you have set things right, you have made justice to prevail in terms of things that you have done unjustly. Now, the other illustration Jesus gives in Matthew 5, verse 25-26 also is very clearly on the same subject. Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him.

That means on the way to court from the context as we can see. Lest your adversary deliver you to the judge. And the judge hand you over to the officer and you will be thrown into prison.

Assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny. What has this got to do with the general theme of this discussion? Well, if we understand the way that I have been saying it to be the main thought, it makes plenty good sense. The idea is, if you do not make it right with your brother as he tells you to do in the previous illustration, your brother may come and take you to court.

He says, agree with your brother out of court. Why? Because if it comes to a court battle, you may lose. Now, obviously, Jesus is assuming some criminal act or some injustice on your part.

Jesus is a realist. He knows his disciples are not perfect. And they have sometimes given people cause to be offended.

They have wronged people. And therefore, they better go and make it right. They better go and pay what they owe or whatever.

Because if they do not, they may be hailed before the court. And guess what? If you deserve to go to jail, that is Jesus where I am going to let you go. And I am not going to get you out of there.

You are going to pay every penny. That is pay what you owe. You can sit in jail and pray for me to open the prison doors and send an angel or an earthquake to break open the prisons.

I am not going to do it. Because you deserve to rot there until you pay what you owe. The implication is you are guilty of something.

And if you do not take it on yourself to get it right between you and your brother, then who knows? The courts may have to handle it. And if they handle it, do not expect God to deliver you supernaturally from their hand when you are in fact worthy of the punishment. If you do not make justice a priority in your life, it will affect your relationship with God and with man.

Now, notice that he starts out with the idea of murder, which is probably the ultimate injustice. But he says when God said do not murder, there is more that he had in mind. There is something underlined that was his concern.

And this concern affects areas of much less severe crimes. And it really pervades all human relationships. The way you think about your brother, the way you speak about your brother, the way you pay your debts to your brother, the way you observe your brother's rights and do not do criminal things against him.

All of this has to do with treating your brother justly. And so what he is saying is of course you do not go out and murder people, but if you are out there being angry with your brother, speaking evil of your brother, cheating your brother in lesser ways, you are in violation of the very thing that God was concerned about when he said not to murder. Murder just being an extreme case of a principle that applies to many much more or much less scandalous behaviors.

And then he gives another example in the area of adultery. He says you have heard that it was said to those of old you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Now, again, adultery like murder is one of those wrongdoings that can be objected to on many grounds. It could be objected to on the grounds of unfaithfulness. It could be objected to on the grounds of moral impurity.

There is a number of things about adultery that are objectionable. But certainly one of the things that is objectionable about adultery is it is a violation of somebody's rights.

And that's what we're talking about in terms of justice.

There are several points Jesus could make about the objectionableness of adultery. But I believe that the point he has in mind here is to show that like murder, adultery has something in common with murder. Now, by the way, I want to point out to you that of the six things that Jesus says you have heard that it was said, only these first two come from the Ten Commandments.

The other four are from other parts of the law or even in some case from rabbinic tradition. But with the possible exception that he says in verse 33, it is said, You shall not swear falsely. That could be seen as an application of you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

We'll talk about that another time. But as far as direct quotes from the Ten Commandments, only the first two illustrations of the six that Jesus gives are taken from it, which means that they are linked in thought. And in my understanding, and I've made this point previously, not only a moment ago, but I've made it in previous lectures, that the Ten Commandments, principally especially of the second table of the law, from honor your parents on down to you shall not covet, those laws are principally all concerned about justice.

Honor your father and mother. Why? Because it's the just thing to do. They took care of you when you were helpless.

You take care of them. You honor them for what, give them what they have due, the respect that's due to them. Don't kill.

Why? Because you violate a man's right to his life. Don't commit adultery. Why? Because you violate his right to his wife.

Don't steal. Why? Because you violate his right to his property. Don't bear false witness.

Why? Because you violate his right to his good name. Don't covet. Why? Because that's the motivation to do all the other things that are wrong.

But the whole issue of the laws in the Ten Commandments, I think the underlying issue that they all have in common is the issue of justice. In every case, those commandments are to preserve certain inherent rights that certain individuals have. A right to their life, to their spouse's fidelity, to their property, to their good name, and so forth.

Now, in bringing up two examples from the Ten Commandments, I believe that Jesus is trying to make the same point in both cases. To my mind, it's more obvious in the first case, because the illustrations he gives all have to do with something clearly to do with justice. He doesn't clarify it because he speaks at much less length on the subject of adultery.

He doesn't give this number of examples or anything. But I believe that his concern is the same, both in illustrating from murder and adultery, because the Ten Commandments are mostly concerned about justice. Now, adultery, as I said, is other things too besides being an injustice, but it is at root a great injustice.

Paul clarifies this. It was known instinctively by most people, but just so we have a clear statement of Scripture on this, and know that we're not just talking about cultural expectations, but actually what God has revealed. In 1 Corinthians 7, verses 3 and 4, Paul says, Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Now, when Paul said, the wife doesn't have authority over her own body, but the husband does, every Jew would have agreed with him on that.

But when he said, the husband doesn't have authority over his own body, but the wife does, he was going a little beyond what the Jews would acknowledge. Because, I'll tell you why. What kind of authority, in the Jewish mind, did a man have over his wife? He had the right to her exclusive sexual faithfulness.

Now, that wasn't considered to be so the other direction. A man, for example, under the law, was considered to be within his rights if he had several wives. But no woman could have several husbands.

A woman could only have one husband. She was exclusively his, and he had all the rights over her body. No man could share them, legally.

No man could be a second husband to her while her first husband lived. Yet, a man could have several wives, in which case the woman didn't have exclusive rights to her husband. She had some rights, but she, in some cases, had to share them with other wives.

But Paul removes that. Now, there's no place in the Bible specifically where it says, polygamy is wrong, but you could not follow the teaching of Paul consistently and be a polygamist. Because he says that a woman has now the same rights over her husband's body that her husband has always been known to have over his wife's body.

Namely, the right to exclusive sexual access. It was always known that only one man could sleep with a particular woman. And that was that woman's husband.

But it wasn't... let me put it this way. I already put it probably more clearly than I'm about to anyway, so... The point here is, it was understood that a man might have several wives in the Old Testament, but a woman could not have several husbands. Therefore, the right that a man had over his wife's body was an exclusive right.

No other man could share it. But Paul now turns around and says it's the same way the other way. No woman can share a husband's body with his first wife.

She is his wife. She has exclusive rights to it. Violation of those rights is called adultery.

And that's essentially what adultery is. It's the violation of a right. It's also the breaching of a vow, which makes it unfaithfulness as well as injustice.

But that comes up when we talk about divorce in the next category. But in addition to being unfaithfulness, it's injustice. And I think it's more importantly injustice.

Because it is unfaithfulness, but it's only unfaithfulness to a man or to a woman. But it's injustice to God, who has sanctified marriage. And when a person breaches the sanctity of marriage, they sin directly against God who sanctified it.

And it is for that reason, simply because it violates an intrinsic right that God has bestowed on the man and on the woman, to each other's exclusive access to each other sexually, that adultery is an injustice, a violation of a basic right that God has conferred on the married person. Therefore, adultery and murder are wrong for the same reasons. In some respects, they don't seem to be resembling each other at all.

I mean, you'd put murder in one class of crimes and adultery in a very different class of crimes. In fact, sexual crimes, there's many of them. Bestiality, homosexuality, and so forth, they're all different sexual crimes.

But in some respects, adultery is more in the class of murder than it is in the class of things like homosexuality and bestiality and so forth. Because homosexuality, bestiality, fornication, they are sexual impurity. They are perversions, but they are not a direct violation of anybody's rights in particular.

Except God's right to have you be pure. But adultery is the violation of a fundamental right of the person's marriage partner, just as murder is a violation of a fundamental right that God has bestowed upon people, which is the right to their life. So I believe that Jesus, giving these two examples, shows that God is concerned about justice even in its varied aspects, not only in terms of killing someone, in terms of honoring their right to the exclusive sexual access to their partner.

And that violation of any of the Ten Commandments is an injustice. It harms your neighbor. It violates some of his rights.

And love will not do this, because love is concerned about justice. Love and justice are inseparable. If you're an unjust person violating people's rights, you are simply not loving in that respect.

Now, Jesus goes on in verse 28, very much like what he did with murder. He says, But I

say to you, whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Now, this verse has really been subjected to a lot of twisting and abuse.

Many people quote this, or misquote it, as Jesus saying, whoever lusts after a woman has committed adultery with her in his heart. And that paraphrase, which is an unjust paraphrase, and doesn't capture the meaning at all of what Jesus said, has led many men, and I don't know how many women, to feel extreme condemnation. I don't know about women, because I've never been inside their skin.

But I do know that men struggle with visual sexual temptation. And from what I've heard, I can only say, I can only say what I've heard, I've heard that men have more of a struggle visually with this area than women do. I've heard that men tend to be more easily aroused by sight, and women more by touch.

And while there may be some exceptions to those, I think that that's been a general observation that many have made, and appears to be, on the whole, a pretty fair assessment. Therefore, the man is the one who's more likely to struggle with this idea of looking and lusting, because he is so constituted that he's more readily aroused by sight. Now, men, therefore, especially men who want to be holy and godly, often live with tremendous condemnation by a misapplication of this verse.

Whoever lusts after a woman has committed adultery with her in her heart. Well, the word lust just means desires. And it says in James, lust, when it conceives, brings forth sin.

And sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Lust is not the same thing as sin. Lust, when it conceives, brings forth sin.

There is a time when lust is present, but it is not yet sin, because it is still at the stage of temptation. Now, Jesus doesn't say whoever lusts after a woman has committed the sin of adultery. It'd be the same thing as saying, if God has called you to fast, that for you to, when you smell a steak, that something in you is aroused.

You know, you've got hunger. But you're a sinner if you're aroused. No, you're a sinner if you submit to that arousal, if you allow that arousal to dictate your behavior, rather than obedience to God.

Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted, in all points as we are, yet without sin. To be tempted and to be tempted severely is not the same thing as sin.

Lust, when it conceives, brings forth sin. And Jesus did not say whoever looks at a woman and lusts after her has committed adultery in his heart, because lust is simply desire. And if a person desires what he cannot have, then, of course, he's facing a temptation.

It's what he decides to do about that desire that determines whether he's committed adultery in his heart. And look what Jesus actually said. He said, whoever looks at a woman, to lust after her.

In other words, he's speaking about the reason the man is looking. It's not that he's walking down the street, minding his own business, trying to be godly, and a woman walks in front of him who has hardly any clothes on, and suddenly, involuntarily, there's a distraction there to him. And his eyes are averted.

I mean, maybe he should gain self-control over that, and certainly he should. But the point is, Jesus is not describing that situation. He's not describing the situation where you're driving down the street, and there's a billboard with a naked person on it, practically, and you didn't want to see it.

You would have avoided it had you known it, but there it is. And something is aroused. Now you've got to undo it.

You've got to breathe it, and you've got to keep your body under, and so forth. And if you do keep your body under, and if you don't surrender to that, then you have not committed adultery. You've been tempted to, but you haven't done it.

It's when a man looks at a woman too lust after her that he's doing what Jesus said should not be done, because this means that he knows where to look in order to stimulate this illicit arousal. He's looking at a woman for the purpose of committing mental adultery with her. And most men know well the difference between that and accidentally seeing someone and getting attracted in a way that would not be wholesome to submit to that attraction.

But for a man to mentally undress a woman as he looks at her, or to look at her so that he might, or to buy pornographic literature so that he might look and lust, or to get a movie on video because he knows there's going to be something there that will arouse this interest and this side of his nature, this is adultery. This man is succumbing before he even looks. He's looking because he has succumbed.

He's looking because he wants to commit adultery in his heart. And what Jesus is saying is that the Pharisees and others no doubt committed adultery in their hearts willfully all the time, but they would never stoop so low as to commit it outwardly. There's too much shame, too many penalties perhaps to face in that situation.

But they would get the same kind of arousal for themselves mentally by their fantasies. And they would think that they were not in violation of what God said. But you see, if it is a violation of a husband's rights that you sleep with his wife, then it's equally a violation of his rights that you mentally sleep with his wife.

Her body, her sexual distinctives are for his eyes only. Which is why modesty is so much

called for in many of the epistles on the part of women. Men should be modest also, but again I think I've heard more men complain than women about this, about the immodest dress on women.

That if a woman does not dress modestly, then she is of course presenting a temptation to a man to desire what he cannot rightly have. And, you know, we're talking in the context of married women here, and I think it's implied when Jesus said if you look at a woman to lust after you've committed adultery, well adultery applies to married women. So if you're looking at someone else's wife and seeking the kind of gratification that only her husband has the right to, you are stealing from him something that is not his.

And of course you're debasing her too, but that's another issue. I mean there's all kinds of criminal nuances to this thing, but the real issue here is that just like if you're angry at your brother without a cause, you've got the same kind of violation as if you killed him without a cause. So also if you look at a woman in order to lust after her, but you don't have the guts to go out and do it, praise God that you don't, but you shouldn't even do the thing in your mind, it's still the same lack of concern for the basic rights of the sanctity of that marriage.

Now what about unmarried people? Should they look at each other and lust after each other? Obviously not, because fornication is wrong too. Obviously if he was talking about sexual purity in general, rather than the rights of married partners, he could have used the word fornication. If you look at any woman, single or otherwise, to lust after her, then you commit fornication in your heart, which is also forbidden.

But maybe for different reasons. Because fornication is an impure thing, it's sexual impurity. It is also of course a violation of the marital rights of the future wife or future husband of the party that you're looking on with lust.

Maybe that person isn't married right now and nobody at the moment has any claim on their sexual distinctives, but someone no doubt shall in the future. So long as it isn't you that does, then you've got no right to it. And to take what isn't yours by right is to do an injustice.

Now about cutting off a hand, plucking out an eye, unfortunately many people have taken this much too much literally. I've known people who've actually tried to cut off their hands and so forth. This is a failure to appreciate the presence of hyperbole in the teaching of Jesus, and Jesus uses hyperbole on many occasions.

In the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere. This is probably one of the most blatant cases. Now on the one hand it's hyperbole, on the other hand it's a literal statement too.

He just doesn't expect that anyone will ever carry it out because what he's calling for would never require it. If your hand causes you to sin, if your eye causes you to sin, get

rid of it. What he's essentially saying is anything that causes you to sin, that causes you to stumble, that causes you not to enter the kingdom of God and not pursue after God, you're better off without it even if it's something precious to you, even if it's something painful to part with, even if it were a hand or an eye.

Now it can't literally be a hand or an eye because the Bible indicates eyes and hands don't really cause you to sin. Jesus said elsewhere in Matthew 15 and in the parallel in Mark 7 that it's the heart that causes people to sin. Out of the heart come adulteries and murders and fornications and blasphemies and so forth.

These things come from the heart, which means that you could cut off both hands and pluck out both eyes and you'd still have adulteries and blasphemies and fornications possible to you because you've still got a wicked heart. And clearly he's not advocating the plucking out of your heart, literally. For one thing, it's not your literal heart, your blood pump under the fifth rib that he's talking about when he says it comes out of there.

I mean if you could kill yourself by taking your heart out, you haven't really gotten the real source of it. The real source of it is in your nature, the metaphorical heart. It's what's in you.

Your hand doesn't make you sin. Your hand might sin, but something is making it sin. Something is giving orders to your hands.

Your eye may sin, but if it does, it is because it's taking orders from something else deeper within you in your sinful nature that orders it to do so. Therefore, the literal cutting off of the hand or the literal plucking out of the eye is in no sense intended because for one thing, it wouldn't do what he's saying needs to be done. It wouldn't prevent you from sinning.

If you plucked out one eye, you'd still have another eye. You could do as much mental adultery with one eye as with two. I know a guy who actually tried to cut off his hand because he had an ongoing problem with masturbation.

But you can have a problem with masturbation with one hand as well as with two. It only takes one. And by the way, if he gets rid of both hands, he still has the same wicked heart.

He'll find other ways to get the job done. The fact of the matter is, Jesus is not describing actual potentialities, that you can really get rid of the sin problem by cutting off your hand or your eye. He's making a statement that whereas a person's eyes and hands are perhaps the most valuable things that he has to his survival and his existence and his quality of life, even such things as valuable as that, and there are very few things that would ever be that valuable to you, even such things as that, if it came to that.

If you couldn't keep them and have the kingdom too, you should get rid of them. Now, of course, what it really boils down to in real behavior, probably has nothing to do with plucking out eyes or cutting off hands, but more things like getting rid of other things precious to you that are a problem in these areas, that excite your wicked heart. The Bible makes it very clear that bad company corrupts good morals.

And therefore, there may be relationships, treasured relationships, relationships that you'd rather pluck out an eye than get rid of that relationship. You'd sooner part with your hand than with that person. But yet, that person, that person's relationship to you keeps you from living a righteous life, from obeying Jesus.

That person is a continual temptation in your life. That person is, maybe because they disapprove or persecute you because of your faith, they cause you to compromise, or at least they are a major influence toward your compromising. In such cases, you'd be better off getting rid of that, putting it far from you, costly and painful as it may seem, rather than go to hell and take that relationship to hell with you.

A lot of people like to do that. They say, I don't mind going to hell, all my friends are going to be there. Well, relationships in hell are going to be greatly strained, I have a feeling.

And Jesus said it's better to part with it, whatever it is, than to keep it and go to hell with it. Might be some possessions, believe it or not. Some people will not obey God because it would cost them their house, their car, their standard of living, their record collection, or something like that.

You know what I mean? It's possible for a person, or a possession, or an ambition, a goal in life, that's been treasured for many years. I've always wanted to be a doctor, I've always wanted to be rich, I've always wanted to be a politician or whatever. But if God has a different call on your life, to give up that cherished ambition is the only sensible thing to do.

If something that you love and crave and desire causes you to sin, or is a continual influence and temptation towards sin to which you frequently succumb, obviously the absolute separation of yourself from that thing is the only wise thing to do. Now, Jesus brings this up in the context of adultery, and particularly in the context of mental adultery. There are some women, no doubt, or men, that you cannot be around without having the wrong kinds of feelings about them.

That's your fault, not theirs, but it nonetheless is true. There are some people who just push the buttons, the way they look, the way they dress, the way they sit, the way they walk, the way they talk, something about them, just as a continual temptation to you. You ought to do all you can to keep that person out of your sight.

Many people, as I said, read magazines and videos that arouse these desires. Some people are what psychologists would call addicted to such things. I don't believe in such addictions, but I do believe that we're all addicted to sin until we're set free by Jesus.

These things have to be put away, because God is the avenger of those who are adulterers, it says in Hebrews 13. And a vengeance suggests that a right has been violated. Let me give you this last scripture, even though we ran out of tape before I get to it.

It's in Hebrews 13. And verse 4.