

Sermon on the Mount

Beyond the Commandments... Jesus Teaches Us Purity of Heart Matthew 5:27 - 30

You have heard it said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
Matthew 5: 27 - 28

On the surface, this Scripture passage seems pretty straight-forward. When it comes to lust or adultery: don't do it! Yet, Jesus reminds us that sinfulness is not just about actions. Rather, sinfulness is something *within the heart* that may ultimately lead to harmful action.

Now, we may think, "Yes, I was tempted, but thankfully I didn't give in!" While not giving in is preferred, perhaps the more virtuous way of thinking is: "Why was I tempted in the first place? What is it about the object desired that attracted me?" And this applies beyond adultery to all of our harmful thoughts and actions. This is where the subtlety of sin comes in; harmful, dubious actions are often outward manifestations of a deeper, more subtle discontent. Jesus asks us to search our hearts for the underlying cause of a temptation, whatever it is, and to address it so that we will eventually be freed from all discontent. In the end, Jesus wants us to have a clean and pure heart, a heart that is free from the temptation to sin.

It is the relationship between the eyes and the heart which leads Jesus in the next two verses to give some very practical instruction about how to maintain a pure heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 5:29 - 30

We may have to eliminate from our lives certain things which either are, or could easily become, sources of temptation. If we struggle with anger and prejudice, we may need to stop watching the news or violent television shows. If we struggle with alcohol, we may need to stop going out for a drink with a colleague after work. If we struggle with pornography, we may need to stop reading certain literature and/or seeing certain films. We may even have to become culturally 'maimed', giving up certain friends, acquaintances, or social activities in order to preserve our purity of heart.

Jesus was quite clear about it. It is better to lose one member and enter life maimed, He said, than to retain our whole body and go to hell. In other words, it is better to forgo some experiences this life offers in order to remain in right relationship with God.

Reflection Question: Do I need to eliminate a source of temptation from my life? If so, this is how I choose to accomplish that ...