

**Matthew**  
**The Deadly Sin of Lust (Part 1)**  
**Matthew 5:27-30**  
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Recently, I was reflecting on the fact that the subtle changes in the words we use are often a profound window into the shifting and changing cultural beliefs and values. I want to bring out that reality in one category of life. The change, over the last hundred years, in the vocabulary we use about physical intimacy in marriage, is incredibly insightful. Over time, one phrase gradually replaced another as attitudes and values shifted. Now in Scripture, as you know, the most common way to refer to physical intimacy in marriage has to do with an intimate knowledge of the other person. Adam ‘knew’ Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. In terms of English, from the 1500s, sort of Old English, to the 1800s, that Biblical language was a common way that both believers and even unbelievers referred to physical intimacy. But a change began to occur. From the early 1800s to the mid-1900s, the most common non-clinical expression was ‘to make love.’ As you know, originally, that expression spoke of romance and courtship, but by the early to mid-20th century, it had shifted to be the primary way to refer to physical intimacy. Other expressions, of course, entered English, such as ‘to sleep with someone’ as a euphemism for sexual relations. Another expression, however, that appeared in the 1920s and 30s, and then absolutely exploded into common usage with the sexual revolution of the 1960s, was ‘sex,’ or ‘to have sex.’ With the 1960s, this replaced almost every other expression and euphemism and became the sort of default everyday term.

Now, of course you know, with the coarsening of our culture, a variety of other terms, even vulgar ones, have become popular over time. I worked in the shipyards in the late 70s and 80s, as I was working my way through college and seminary, and there's nothing I haven't heard.

Those terms became popular as a way to speak of sexual intimacy. Now, I tell you that because I want you to think, for a moment with me, about that seismic shift in our language. Do you see how the change in vocabulary reflected changing beliefs about physical intimacy? What was once considered to be a special gift from God, that pictured the love and intimate knowledge and relationship between two persons made in God's image, eventually became merely a sexual act with really no difference from that of animals. That's a huge shift in understanding and values, and it happened to all of us without our even really noticing it.

Today, we begin to study what Jesus says about sexual sin. I tell you all of that because, in this series, I'm not going to use the words 'sex' or 'have sex,' not because I'm a prude and want to avoid them publicly, but because I want to help us all recapture the beauty and wonder of this gracious, generous gift of God, as well as, as we'll see, the catastrophic results of misusing such a precious divine gift.

Now, sadly, the change in language has also been accompanied by a greater change in attitudes about sexual sin. Consider, for example, the views on premarital sex. In 1953, by the age of 21, 23% of young women confessed that they had lost their virginity, 23% by 21 years of age. Fast forward to 2002, and 46% of young women had said they'd had sex by the age of 19. And, of course, as you might imagine, among young men, the numbers were even greater. Consider the practice of living together as couples outside of marriage. According to the newest U.S. census in 2025, fewer than half, 47% of U.S. households were married couples. Fifty years earlier, nearly two-thirds or 66% were. The same change in values is true when it comes to adultery. A survey sponsored by the National Science Foundation has tracked the social behaviors of Americans since 1972. Their data shows that for many years, the rate of adultery in our culture was fairly stable. An average of 10% of married people said that they'd been unfaithful to their

spouse. But the infidelity rate now, for those younger than 35, has grown to about 15% for women and 20% for men. And this is even more both shocking and dismaying, the rate of adultery for men over 60 has increased to 28% and for women over 60 from 5% to 15% in that same period of time.

Tragically, as the culture has continued its slide, Christians have been heavily influenced by the pervasive sexual atmosphere of our times. Even those who claim to be followers of Jesus are comfortable watching and enjoying programs and movies that glorify or glamorize sexual sin. Their playlists include songs that make sexual intimacy before and outside of marriage appear fun and attractive. Blatant sexuality has become so pervasive that the average Christian doesn't even see it anymore. In the paragraph in "The Sermon on the Mount" that we come to today, Jesus demands of us, His followers, that we neither accept nor follow the sexual norms of the unbelievers around us. He has an entirely different standard for us. Let's read it together.

Matthew, chapter 5, verse 27. Jesus says this:

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY;' but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it's better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

That's a surprising, shocking, startling, troubling passage. What Jesus teaches us here is that in God's eyes, even sexual lust violates the commandment against adultery; and as Jesus' disciples, we must take whatever steps necessary to cut lust, along with all sexual sins, out of our lives.

Now let me just remind you of the context of these comments. We're studying the body, the heart of "The Sermon on the Mount." It begins in chapter 5, verse 17; it runs all the way through chapter 7, verse 12. And in the body of the Sermon, Jesus describes how the citizens of His spiritual kingdom live. Back, you remember in verses 17 to 19, Jesus describes the essence of kingdom righteousness as wholehearted obedience to Scripture. And in verse 20, notice what He says there, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Here He explains that His disciples' obedience to Scripture is radically different from the kind of obedience offered by the scribes and Pharisees. It's radically different in that it starts with and permeates the heart! Now in the rest of chapter 5, then, Jesus gives six illustrations of how the righteousness of His Disciples surpasses that of the scribes. Over the last few weeks, we've examined His first, of the six illustrations, the Sixth Commandment against murder. He tells us that that Commandment also forbids the anger from which murder springs.

Now today, we come to his second illustration, and here, Jesus deals with the heart sin that is related to the Seventh Commandment against adultery. This second illustration really unfolds in much the same way as the first, and so we're going to follow the same outline as we did with that one. So, let's start then, by considering "The Law against Adultery Recalled," the law against adultery recalled. Verse 27, "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.'" Now, I want you to note that this second illustration and the third illustration both deal with the same Commandment, the Seventh Commandment against adultery. In the text I just read, verses 27 to 30, Jesus explains that lust violates the Seventh Commandment. In verses 31 and 32, He teaches us that unbiblical divorce also violates that Commandment.

So let's look at it; go back to verse 27. Here Jesus quotes verbatim the Seventh Commandment from the Septuagint version. The Septuagint was just the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures done 100 or 200 years before Christ. It's the Bible they used often, even frequently, both Jesus and the Apostles, in the first century. He quotes here from the Septuagint back in Exodus 20. I want you to turn there with me, Exodus, chapter 20, I want you to see this in its context. By the way, He quotes it verbatim from Exodus 20, but you can also find it in Deuteronomy 5, verse 18, identically. So look at Exodus 20 and verse 14. Here's the Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery."

Now, originally, I want you to get a sense of the gravitas of this, originally, God Himself spoke these words from Mount Sinai. Go back to verse 1, "Then God spoke all these words, saying." You see, the children of Israel, some two-million of them, were gathered around the foot of Mount Sinai, and chapter 19 described what was happening. The mountain was shaking, there was an earthquake, there was a cloud on top where there was thunder, and lightning, there was smoke, there was a fire, and in the midst of all of that, there was a trumpet that grew increasingly loud where one couldn't hear themselves think. And then suddenly, the trumpet stopped blowing, and out of the fire on the top of the mountain, God Himself spoke with His own voice. They heard God speak these words. "You shall not commit adultery!" I believe it was the eternal Son of God who spoke those words from Mount Sinai. Then, after He spoke them, He wrote them, engraved them, on two tablets of stone.

Turn over to chapter 31; chapter 31, and look at verse 18, "When He (God) had finished speaking with him (Moses) upon Mount Sinai, He (God) gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." Now, folks, it's impossible to overstate the gravitas of these words spoken by God from the mountain, and then God Himself

engraved them with His own finger in tablets of stone. The first table, or tablet, included the four Commands dealing with our duty to God: “You shall have no other gods before Me; You shall not make for yourself an idol; You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; and Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” The second table, or tablet, contained the six Commands dealing with our duty to one another, and it included this Command against adultery.

Now, that raises a really important question for us, and that is, “Why do the Ten Commandments include only one sexual sin, the sin of adultery? Is that the only serious sexual sin?” Well, obviously not. I mean, God required the death penalty for adultery, but He also required, in Old Testament Israel, the death penalty for other sexual sins, such as rape, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. So clearly then, adultery is not included in the Ten Commandments because it's a worse offense than the others. To really grasp why the Ten Commandments include only this sexual sin, you first must understand the fundamental purpose of the Ten Commandments. God chose these Ten Commands, and He set them apart, and this is key, as a summary of all of His commands. Think of the Ten Commandments as an ‘Easy-to-remember outline’ of everything else God demands and requires of us. You see, for hundreds of years, most Israelites didn't have their own written copy of God's Law. So, God gave them an easily-remembered outline of His law, only ten Hebrew words; we call them “The Ten Commandments.” Anyone, even a young child, can remember ten words. And in remembering those ten words, you carried along with you a really handy outline of everything God required of His people. Each of those ten words, each of those Ten Commands, addresses one aspect or category of life. For example, the Fifth Command, to honor one's parents, is not just about parents. It is about parents, but it's an even larger reminder that God established human authority

on this planet, and we are to respect and to submit to all divinely-ordained human authority. Children are commanded to submit to their parents, wives to their husbands, Paul makes it, employees to bosses, church members to elders, and citizens to government—God established human authority. Those are not human constructs. And unless the one in authority tells you to do something that's contrary to Scripture and to what God requires, we are to acknowledge and to honor those in those positions of authority. That's how each of the Ten Commandments work. They each deal with a large category of how we are to relate either to God or to one another.

Another example, the Ninth Commandment, the specific sin of “bearing false witness,” is there to remind us that God has the right to tell us how to use our speech. What we say is not up to us. God has told us how not to speak and how to speak, and the Ninth Commandment just reminds us that He's Lord over that category. Now you're saying, “Tom, that sounds interesting, but how do you know that? How do we know that's how we should interpret the Ten Commandments?” Well, it's because God Himself embeds this principle of interpretation into one of the Commandments.

Look at the Tenth Commandment. Look down in verse 17, if you're still in Exodus 20, verse 17, “You shall not covet,” there's the Command, ”You shall not covet.” Then God lists a series of examples to show us that coveting of all different kinds is forbidden. Notice what He says, “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” You see, the Tenth Commandment teaches us how to interpret each of the commands. Each of them forbids not only the specific sin mentioned, but all sins that fall into the same category of life.

Now with that background, look again at verse 14. God spoke these words from Sinai to His people, “You shall not commit adultery.” Obviously, that's not the only kind of sexual sin that God forbids. But by including this one kind of sexual sin, God is reminding His people, and He's reminding us, that He has the right to tell us how to use and how not to use the gift that comes from Him of sexual intimacy. That's what this command is there to remind us.

So let's look then, first of all, at “What This Command Forbids,” what this command forbids.

The first one is obvious, right? “Specifically, it forbids adultery.” Jesus demands that, for His disciples, God's gift of sexual intimacy in marriage must not be violated by the sexual sin of adultery. The Greek word translated ‘commit adultery’ is very specific. It refers to a married person having sexual intimacy with anyone other than his or her spouse. Now as we sit here in a country that has some lingering marks of the Judeo-Christian ethic, that's not a shock to us.

However, to many in the ancient world, this was actually a novel idea because, in the first century, it was generally acceptable for a married man to be unfaithful to his wife as long as it wasn't with a married woman because then he was violating the rights of her husband. But as long as it was a woman who wasn't married, it was okay for a man. A woman, on the other hand, was to remain pure before marriage and completely faithful after marriage—a bit of a double standard! But Jesus here makes it clear that God demands purity of everyone, male and female.

How do we know that? Because He quotes the Old Testament commandment verbatim, and did you notice the Old Testament Command has no gender? “You shall not commit adultery,” Period! Paragraph! Everybody! So then in verse 27, in quoting the Commandment, Jesus commands this of both sexes and especially here of His disciples, both sexes of His disciples.

You'll notice then in verse 28, He specifically addresses men. Ladies, that's not because you're

excluded. It's because in the first century, a free pass was often given to men, and so He wants to make it clear that we don't get a pass. Jesus makes it clear, then here, to all His disciples that He absolutely forbids being unfaithful to your spouse in the covenant of marriage.

But the Seventh Commandment doesn't stop there. It also forbids “Generally: All Sexual Sins.” You see, in this Commandment against adultery, God forbids every deviation from His intention for human sexuality. Remember what we saw about what the Ten Commandments are there to do in forbidding this one sin; He's forbidding sexual sin of all kinds. This means that this Command forbids being involved in any sexual intimacy outside the context of heterosexual marriage. The writer of Hebrews makes this very clear, Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 4, “Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all.” By the way, Jesus defines marriage as between one man, one woman for life in Mark 10. So, “Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be undefiled*; for fornicators and adulterers (Those words capture the full range of sexual sin.) God will judge.”

So what exactly are the sins forbidden in the Seventh Commandment? Well the Westminster Larger Catechism answers that in Question 139, “What are the sins forbidden in the Seventh Commandment?” Now I'm going to give you their answer, but I've updated the language so that, hopefully, you'll catch it even quicker, alright? So this is a kind of paraphrase, but it'll hopefully get the idea to you. Here's what's forbidden in the Seventh Commandment:

- Adultery, premarital sex, rape, polygamy, incest, homosexuality
- All sexual desire to engage in those sins—whether in the imagination, thoughts, plans, or affections
- Talking about sexual sin, including crass sexual jokes or subtle innuendo or listening to such talk
- Sexually charged looks that display sexual hunger

- Wearing immodest clothes; forbidding legitimate marriage; being involved with prostitutes
- Deciding to remain single when you don't have the gift of singleness; undue delay of marriage; unbiblical divorce; deserting your spouse
- Entertainment that excuses or celebrates sexual sin
- And anything that stirs up...sexual sin in ourselves or others

Now, if you go to the larger catechism, you'll see that each one of those is keyed to a passage of Scripture; they're not just picked out of the air. That's what the Seventh Commandment forbids. But the Seventh Commandment, what I want you to see is, it not only forbids the specific sin of adultery, but it forbids all other sexual sin.

But now let's consider the other side, “What Does the Seventh Commandment Require of Us?”

As I pointed out to you, eight of the Ten Commandments are worded negatively, “You shall not...” But two of them are positive, “Remember the Sabbath...” and “Honor your father and mother.” That's not an accident—instead, it's a teaching point. You see, that variation teaches us how to interpret all of them—the sins are forbidden and the virtues are commanded. Or let me put it this way, “Not only does each commandment forbid all the sins in that category; each Commandment also demands all of the opposite virtues.” In the case of the Seventh Commandment, it's not enough to keep from adultery. You must also pursue sexual purity.

What does that purity look like? Well, let me summarize what I just shared with you. “If you're not married, it means that you must be committed to saving God's good gift of physical intimacy for marriage.” And “If you're married,” it means two things. “It means that you must reserve the gift of physical intimacy *solely* for your spouse.” That's what Jesus clearly commands here (Matt. 5:27). And secondly, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, “You must enjoy the gift of physical intimacy *regularly with* your spouse; the only reason you wouldn't is by mutual consent

for a good reason.” To do otherwise is to disobey Christ. Your body doesn't belong to you, Paul says, it belongs to your spouse. So, this is how we pursue sexual purity and using God's good gift in a way that reflects His purpose. So, we could summarize the Seventh Commandment like this, “God gave us the gift of sexual intimacy, and He insists that we enjoy it solely in keeping with His design and His purpose.”

Now, when you come to our Lord, He could not have more clearly or profoundly affirmed both marriage and sexual intimacy in marriage than He actually did. I mean, think about it. As the pre-incarnate Son of God, He created marriage—marriage is not a human construct. In the Garden of Eden, the eternal Son of God created marriage, and He performed the first wedding. He brought the first couple together, Adam and Eve. Fast forward to His earthly life and ministry, although Jesus Himself wasn't married, during His ministry, He explicitly affirmed marriage and physical intimacy within marriage in many different ways. In His teaching here, in other places, but think about it, where did He perform his first miracle? At a wedding, a wedding that would, according to Jewish custom and law, soon be consummated. As we saw in Matthew 5, Jesus affirmed the Old Testament in the strongest possible terms as the eternal, living, perfect Word of God. And guess what the Hebrew Scriptures teach? In Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, the Scriptures teach the wonder, the beauty, and the joy of married love and intimacy within marriage. So the Seventh Command, then, affirms the God-given gift of human sexuality and, at the same time, demands that gift be enjoyed in the ways and only in the ways that God intended.

So, what does that mean then, is required in the Seventh Command. We looked at the sins forbidden. Let me give you the other side of it. This also is from the Westminster Catechism, the larger catechism. Question 138, “What are the duties required in the Seventh Commandment?”

Positively, what does it demand? Again, I've paraphrased these for clarity. Let me just walk through them:

- Complete purity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior
- Being careful to guard our own purity and that of others
- Carefully guarding our eyes and other senses
- Choosing to befriend only those committed to sexual purity
- Dressing modestly; pursuing marriage if you don't have the gift of singleness; keeping your heart and body for your future spouse
- Being faithful to enjoy the physical relationship in marriage; living with your spouse and not being apart for long periods of time
- Staying away from all circumstances that tempt you to sexual sin
- And resisting that temptation to sexual sin

That's what the Seventh Command requires of us. So understand this, here in our text, when Jesus recalled and affirmed the Seventh Commandment, He was demanding that we reject the sins that it forbids and that we pursue the duties it requires. In so doing, our Lord was also intentionally contradicting what the scribes and Pharisees taught about this commandment.

Let's briefly consider, secondly, "The Law against Adultery Misinterpreted," the law against adultery misinterpreted (Matt. 5:27-28). You see, the scribes and Pharisees were right to quote the Seventh Commandment. It's what God said, it is His prescription for life in this world. But they were wrong in how they interpreted it; it didn't go nearly far enough. How do we know that? Well, let me remind you again, step back for a moment. Jesus gave us six illustrations here of how His disciples' righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. In the first illustration, verse 21, and again in the last illustration, verse 43, Jesus clearly stated what the scribes' misinterpretation was. We saw it in the first one, we'll see it in the last one. But in the intervening illustrations, two through five, Jesus only implied what their misinterpretation was.

Even though He did not directly tell us how the scribes misinterpreted the Seventh Command, we can piece it together from what He said in correcting their teaching.

Now, with that in mind, look again at Matthew 5, verse 28, “But I say to you (In other words, I’m going to say something contrary to how they’ve explained God’s Law. I say to you.) that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” The simple fact that Jesus applied this Commandment to lust meant that the scribes didn’t. In other words, their misinterpretation of the Command against adultery was like that of the first illustration, the Command against murder. They made it almost exclusively about external actions. They taught and thought that if you avoided sinful sexual acts, you had obeyed God. John Stott writes, “This was a conveniently narrow definition of sexual sin and a conveniently broad definition of sexual purity.” But I like even better the way that Ken Hughes puts it; listen to this:

In the first century (This is what he’s talking about; He says.) you were either an adulterer, or you were not. And if you were a ‘caught adulterer,’ you were dead. That really made it simple. How convenient and how deadly. It’s very natural for those of us who are non-adulterers to feel smug and conceited, “I have not committed that sin; Jesus is speaking to the rest of you sinners, not to me. Listen up, you reprobates!”

You see, because of their self-righteousness, they were hard-hearted and severe toward those who had physically committed adultery. You remember in John, chapter 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery, they brought to Jesus? What did they want to happen to her? They wanted her stoned. Now, I wish I had time to take you there, but you remember the story. It’s very telling that John says they caught the couple in the act of adultery. And who did they bring to Jesus? Only the woman. That gives us tremendous insight into their perspective of sexual sin

when it came to men. And folks, if they were lax toward men on the issue of adultery, they practically ignored the sin of lust! That's not surprising, by the way, because later in the Gospel of Matthew and even in this "Sermon," Jesus is going to tell us they were false teachers. And guess what's always true about false teachers? Listen to Peter in 2 Peter 2:14, he tells us there that all false teachers have "eyes full of adultery." Doesn't matter how holy they look from, you know, that guy on YouTube or on television looking slick and sounding holy to the pope sitting in the Vatican, if he's a false teacher, he has "eyes full of adultery," that's what Peter says.

In the following verses here, Jesus showed just how badly they misinterpreted and misapplied the Seventh Commandment. And He crushed their pride, their self-righteousness. But wait a minute, that day when Jesus spoke these words, He wasn't talking to the scribes; He was talking to His disciples. He was talking to us. And folks, He is still saying this to us:

If you're going to follow Me, if you're going to be My disciple, don't imitate the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees; it doesn't go nearly far enough. I forbid you (Jesus says) from violating the gift of physical intimacy that I have given you. I forbid you from sinful sexual acts, and I require not only that, but that you not even tolerate sinful sexual thoughts and desires. That's the righteousness I demand," (Paraphrase).

That's the kind of righteousness that those who are truly in Jesus' kingdom long for and want to pursue with all of their heart.

Look back up at verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Only those who are truly spiritually clean in heart will enter God's presence. Now, as soon as I say that, if you're honest with yourself, you realize we all have a huge problem. And that's that Jesus is the only one who truly has ever had a pure heart. He's the only one who never violated the Seventh Commandment, mentally or physically. He never lusted once in His entire life, and He never

sinned sexually once in those thirty-three years. Our hearts, on the other hand, if you're honest with yourself, when I gave you that list of sins, when I gave you that list of what God requires in the Seventh Commandment, if you're honest with yourself, you recognize that you, like me, have a sinful, dirty heart. That's our background. That's our history.

So, "How then can our hearts become clean?" Three ways. Number one, "God completely cleanses the heart of the believing sinner at salvation." Aren't you glad for the Gospel? Acts, chapter 15, verse 9, they are talking at the Jerusalem council, and this is what is said, "He (God) made no distinction between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles), cleansing their hearts by faith." If you have repented of your sins and believed in Jesus, at that moment, God cleansed your heart; He forgave your sins, and He wiped it away as though it had never happened. 1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have an obedience to the truth purified your souls," that is, in responding to the gospel, your souls have been purified. Listen, if you're here this morning, and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, I hope you see how sinful you are before God. If you're honest with yourself, you do. That's why God's Law was given; it was to show us our need of a savior. You've never kept this Commandment, and I promise you, if I showed you the rest of the other nine, you haven't kept them either, and neither have I. You have no hope of ever being right with God, of ever having your sins forgiven, of ever earning your way into heaven. You have no hope but Jesus because He lived a perfect life for those who would believe in Him, and then He died a death, purchasing forgiveness from God for those who would trust in Him, and that's the only way that your checkered sexual past can be forgiven. It's the only way God will ever accept you, and I plead with you this morning to repent, believe in Jesus.

The second way our hearts can become clean is "God continues to cleanse our hearts as believers as we confess and repent of our sins." 1 John 1, verse 7, "If we walk in the Light,"

talking about believers, we've been saved by faith, we've been cleansed, our hearts have been cleansed by faith in Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection, now we're believers. And “If we walk in the Light (if our lives are marked by obedience to Him, generally, not perfectly, but generally) as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another.” And here's what happens, as we walk in that pattern of obedience, “the blood of Jesus, His Son, (Literally) keeps on cleansing us from all sin.” Verse 9, “If we are confessing our sins (to God), He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins (And I love this.) and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Believer, you have got to take your sins seriously. You have got to continually repent and confess those sins. But that's not enough. If you just repent and say, or you just ask for forgiveness and turn around, expect to sin more, you have missed God's perfect way.

Number three, “We must continually cleanse our own hearts from the patterns of sin.” Now, I don't mean cleanse in the sense that we make ourselves clean before God, only God can do that. What I mean is that we work hard in obeying God, in cutting sin out of our lives. That's exactly what Jesus is going to command us in the verses that follow. You know, get radical with your sin, even *lusts*. “Pluck out your eye...cut off your hand.” He doesn't mean literally, He just means get serious about dealing with sin in your life. 2 Corinthians 7:1, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” “Cleanse ourselves”—what he means is pursue obedience; expend maximum effort to obey God when it comes to the sexual gift He's given you. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, this is exactly the point Paul makes here, 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 1, he writes:

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do

walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority of the Lord Jesus*. For this is the will of God...”

You know, a lot of Christians walk around saying, “I want to know God's will for my life.” Here it is, “this is the will of God, your sanctification.” Specifically, in this passage:

That you abstain from sexual immorality (sin); that each of you know how to possess his own vessel (that is, his own body) in sanctification and honor, (Don't possess your body, verse 5.), not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God (Literally, “in the passion of lust.” Don't live like that; that's how Gentiles live.); *And* that no man (no Christian, no follower of Christ) transgress (sin against God and sin against your brother) defraud his brother in the matter (of the sexual gift) because the Lord is *the avenger* in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*.

Listen, when you sin sexually against someone, against a brother or sister in Christ, God takes that very seriously; God is the avenger. That's a very strong word. Verse 7, “For God has not called us for the purpose of (sexual) impurity, but (He has called us.) in sanctification. So, he who rejects *this* (What I've just told you.) is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.” Listen, God cares about how you conduct yourself with the gift of sexuality and of physical intimacy that He intends for you to use in marriage—He cares, and so should you!

We studied what Jesus taught about anger, and that was hard, and this is hard. But brothers and sisters, this is what Jesus expects if you want to say you're His follower. A no-hint policy. That's Ephesians, we'll see that next time. Not a hint of these things is to be in your life. It's not okay to say, “Well, I don't do that, or I don't do this, or this happens so frequently, or whatever.” No, not a hint. That's the standard. The goal, remember, is not to be better than the people around you—the goal is to be like Jesus!

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for how pointed it is, but how gracious. Lord, how amazingly generous of you to give us the gift of human sexuality, of physical intimacy in marriage. Lord, that was your idea, and it's a gracious and good gift. Forgive us for listening to, being influenced by the world around us, and following their lead in sinning against You in our thoughts, and in our words, and in our actions, and sinning against those around us as well. Father, help us instead to long for purity, to long to be like Jesus in this way.

Father, I pray as well for the people here, who have seen very clearly in Your Word, that they will never earn their way into Your presence. If they've been honest about this morning's message, they know they have no hope outside of Jesus. And I pray this morning they would repent and call out to You to forgive their sins because of Jesus and to change their hearts. Lord, thank You that You promised to hear such a prayer. And I pray this morning there would be those here who cry out in that way, for the glory of Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.