

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 16: The Second Antithesis—The Seventh Commandment

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Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell (Mt. 5:27-30).

Our Lord's second example of the true meaning of the moral law versus the false interpretation of the law by the scribes and Pharisees relates to the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17) or sexual immorality. Once again the command is the same as that written in the Decalogue, but it is the interpretation that comes with this commandment that Jesus refutes. The structure of this antithesis is virtually identical to the one that precedes it. The scribal teaching is identified as received or delivered to the men of old ("to the ancients"). Christ's teaching is preceded by His authoritative formula, "But I say to you." Once again, the Redeemer rejects the scribal view of this commandment which was purely external. (That is, a man was only guilty of adultery if he actually had sexual relations with a married woman.) Instead He teaches the internal nature of this law; lust in the heart and the improper look or stare that comes from that inner lust and feeds it is also a violation of this commandment. This teaching is then followed by material that illustrates the very serious nature of this sin and that warns His followers of the crucial need to do whatever it takes to repent of it. Like the previous section on murder, this pericope ends with the threat of eternal hell for those who do not listen to Jesus and follow His teaching. This is in keeping with the central proposition of verse 20 that unless the disciples' personal righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. As we study this section of Scripture, there are a number of things to consider.

Christ's statement implies that the scribes and Pharisees "restricted the scope of the seventh commandment to the bare act of unlawful intercourse with a married woman."<sup>1</sup> The rabbis' interpretation greatly limited the scope of the seventh commandment, just as they had the sixth. In fact, this interpretation was so limited that the commandment would only apply to a physical act that was a crime. Where did the scribes go wrong in their interpretation of this commandment? They were guilty of not using Scripture to interpret Scripture. They did not view this commandment in terms of the tenth commandment which requires obedience in the heart or mind. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" (Ex. 20:17). They also ignored the clear teaching of the prophets on unlawful lust. Jeremiah 5:8 describes the men of Judah as wicked and worthy of judgment because, "They were like well-fed lusty stallions; everyone neighed

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 80.

after his neighbor's wife." Micah speaks of those who covet fields and thus lay in bed planning iniquity for when the sun arises (cf. 2:1-2). The word "covet" (Hebrew *hamad*, or *awah*—"strongly desire") essentially means "'desire, yearn for, covet, lust after' someone or something, specifically for one's own use or gratification."<sup>2</sup>

The rabbis should have understood that, as commandments 6 through 9 prohibit wrong acts toward one's neighbor, the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment is comprehensive in scope in prohibiting the desires in the heart that leads to such unlawful acts. The scribes and Pharisees did not understand the true dimension of the law. Unlawful desires are wrong because they are contrary to God's nature. He is ethically perfect and demands truth and righteousness in the heart. Forbidden lusts are against Jehovah and thus are intrinsically sinful. Further, unlawful lusts are wrong because they are the source of all wicked deeds against our neighbor. The scribe and Pharisees did not even understand the fundamentals of biblical ethics.

(2) Jesus teaches that "looking on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (v. 28). This statement raises a number of issues.

First, what does our Lord mean by "looking on a woman to lust after her"? The present participle *blepon* denotes a continued looking or what we would call a stare. The man has focused his attention on a woman. Thus, Christ has not forbidden seeing a woman or looking at a woman, but rather a continued looking with impure thoughts. "The construction *pros to* with infinitive denotes purpose (not result), it is somewhat like our phrase, 'with a view to...'"<sup>3</sup> Thus we could paraphrase this statement as, "whoever stares or continuously looks at a woman for the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Some have interpreted the expression "to lust after" as a strong, illicit desire coupled with the intent to carry out the physical act. While lusting after a woman can include the decision to actually commit the deed, lusting and fantasizing without a plan still involves adultery in the heart. The vast majority of men who are guilty of this sin are committing mental adultery, with absolutely no intention of attempting the physical offense. Further, in every Old Testament passage where coveting leads to the physical outward offense a second verb is added indicating that coveting resulted in taking possession (e.g., "covet and seize").<sup>4</sup>

The word for "woman" (*gune*) can also be translated "wife" in that Greek has no ordinary word for wife. Thus, the context is used to determine whether *gune* should be translated as woman or wife. Since the context is adultery, some scholars prefer the translation "wife" (e.g., Tyndale, "a wife" or Cranmer, "another man's wife). They argue that adultery, strictly speaking, describes a violation of the marriage vow. As Alexander notes, "...the verb (*moicheuseis*, *emoicheusen*) has in usage a specific meaning (to commit adultery) and must not be adjusted to the wide sense of the noun (*a woman*), so as to denote fornication, or illicit intercourse in general."<sup>5</sup> If one prefers the translation "a wife," then the prohibition of lust in the heart that results in a lustful stare still obviously applies to fornication by way of inference and application. Because it is likely that most men to whom our Lord was speaking were married, the translation "a woman" would still be appropriate in that lusting after any woman whether married or not would be sinful. Further, "if a more restrictive understanding were in view, one might expect the noun to be modified, e.g., *tou plesiou* [*sou*], 'your neighbor's')." <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 297.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 226.

<sup>4</sup> See John I. Durham, *Exodus*, 298.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 140.

<sup>6</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 120.

Second, in this passage, Jesus condemned two sins that are species of adultery; that are intimately related or interconnected. The Savior is condemning unlawful lust or lusting after that which is forbidden. There is nothing wrong with a strong desire, unless that desire arises from our corrupt nature and is directed to a forbidden act. God gave us natural desires so that man could function in this world and take dominion over it. There is the strong desire for food or drink when we are hungry or thirsty and there is even a desire for sexual relations which is necessary to propagate the human race. The idea that lusting after one's own wife is somehow sinful and degrading came into the Roman Catholic Church from Greek neo-platonism; it is totally pagan. The idea common in Victorian times that sex between husband and wife was a duty not to be relished and enjoyed has absolutely nothing to do with Scripture. "There is not the slightest suggestion here that natural sexual relations within the commitment of marriage are anything but God-given and beautiful. We may thank God that the Song of Solomon is contained in the canon of Scripture, for there is no Victorian prudery there but rather the uninhibited delight of lovers, of bride and bridegroom, in each other."<sup>7</sup> "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

Jesus is only condemning inner lusts directed to a woman who is not one's wife. This lust can involve a variety of sexual fantasies and even plans to carry out these immoral thoughts. These wicked lusts flow from the corruption of our nature. Paul refers to this source as "the old man" (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6); the "sin dwelling in us" (Rom. 7:17); "the law of sin" (Rom. 7:23-25); "the sin which so easily besets us" (Heb. 12:1); "the flesh" (Rom. 7:5, 25; 8:3-5). The evil thoughts that come from within us are sin and, if not repented of, will lead to further sin. "Sin is not merely a matter of actions and deeds; it is something within the heart that leads to the action."<sup>8</sup> Because of the remaining sin in us, we have an enemy inside the gate always ready to betray us. The regenerating power of the Holy Spirit delivers us from the reigning power of sin over us, but the remnant of sin in us still causes sinful lusts to arise in our hearts. Sins that arise in the mind can be very subtle and can seem to arise out of nowhere. Therefore, they are usually the most difficult to control. The sin within us has taken our good God-given desires and has perverted them to sinful lusts which wage war against our souls.

The heart that lusts is connected to eyes that lust and feed the sinful desires of the mind. It is a sin to use any of our senses to serve the lusts in the mind and feed them with fuel for even greater sinful thoughts. When John warns us about the wickedness of the present world system and why we must have no affection for it he says, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:16).<sup>9</sup> "The eyes are the chief channel between the flesh and the outside world; and 'the lust of

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<sup>7</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:237.

<sup>9</sup> "The 'world' here means unregenerate civilization. Pagan Rome and Greece loved athletics and sexual debauchery. The people crowded the stadiums and staged nudist parties. As John will say in 5:29, we know that all America lies in the grip of the devil. Some preachers proclaim that America is materialistic. So far as philosophy goes, there are no longer any materialists at all. If by 'materialistic' these preachers mean greedy and money-mad, they may have some reason for saying so. But most 'money-mad' people seek money in order to buy the pleasures of wine, women, and perhaps a little song. On the shirt of a hang-glider there was an inscription: Only one thing is better than hang-gilding. Under which inscription was the picture of a naked girl. And this was worn in public.

There are, of course, some few people who have other affections. Painters and musicians may praise art for art's sake. Utrillo and his mother were no doubt licentious drunks, but they really loved art. Some practicing atheists love politics. Perhaps they dream of Stalin and Idi Amin, for a fair number of people love power just for the fun of pushing people around. They delight in multiplying regulations for the citizenry. All this is the world that a Christian

the eyes' is the desire of seeing unlawful sights for the sake of the sinful pleasure to be derived from the sight."<sup>10</sup> When related to unlawful sexual sights for the purpose of fantasizing and stimulating sexual desires we have what Peter vividly described as "having eyes full of adultery" (2 Pet. 2:14). Matthew Henry's comments on this sin are excellent: "All approaches toward them; feeding the eye with the sight of the forbidden fruit; not only looking for that end, that I may lust; but looking till I do lust, or looking to gratify the lust, where further satisfaction cannot be obtained. The eye is both the inlet and outlet of a great deal of wickedness of this kind, witness Joseph's mistress (Gen. xxxix.7), Samson (Judg. xvi.1), David, (2 Sam. xi.2). We read of *eyes full of adultery, that cannot cease from sin*, 2 Pet. ii.14. What need have we, therefore, with holy Job to *make a covenant with our eyes*, to make this bargain with them, that they should have the pleasure of beholding the light of the sun and the works of God, provided they would never fasten or dwell upon any thing that might occasion impure imaginations or desires...."<sup>11</sup>

Our culture has degenerated to the point where this sin is celebrated in songs and movies. There are whole industries devoted to feeding this sin (e.g., the multi-billion dollar pornography industry). Unlawful sexual stimulation is used to sell everything from soup to beer to cars to shaving cream. Modern bathing suits are so skimpy and provocative that Christian men cannot go to the public beach or pool without immediately being confronted with many sexually stimulating sights. Many young woman today dress indecently, for the very purpose of causing men to lust after them. For men in particular, this is one of the most common and soul snaring sins around. Our Lord tells us that such behavior is not a trivial matter, but is a serious sin that must be dealt with radically. Figuratively, we must be willing to pluck out our eye or cut off our hand if we offend God in this area.

Third, it is important to recognize just how serious and dangerous sexual lust and fornication is. There is no sin that is discussed more in the epistles. It is probable that more families have been torn apart by this sin than any other. Sexual impurity has likely cause more men to backslide and apostatize than any other iniquity. It has resulted in the disgrace and discipline of many ministers of the gospel. No sin is more strongly prohibited in the law of Christ than impurity. "'Fornication and all uncleanness,' says an apostle, 'let it not be once named among you' [Eph. 5:3]. No species of sin is more degrading to the intellectual and moral nature of man. 'Fleshly lusts war against the soul.' They obscure the mind, they harden the heart, they pervert the affection."<sup>12</sup> Because by nature we are sexual beings, this sin is especially able to enslave our souls. The images of past failures can creep back into the mind and make it unfit for the communion of worship. It was such a problem in the ancient church that Paul was constantly exhorting believers against it. "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 this vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence [i.e. evil desire], even as the Gentiles which know not God: for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:3-7). "Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.... Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:13, 18).

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should not love. It is incompatible with a love for the Father." (Gordon H. Clark, *First John* [Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, (1980) 1992], 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1886] 1980), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:61.

<sup>12</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 1:192.

Fourth, this teaching (like all the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount) should cause all men to realize their complete dependence on Christ for salvation. When we look at Jesus' infallible interpretation of the law and then examine our own lives in terms of it, all of us must become naked beggars in the dust before Him. Although most of us could honestly say that we have never committed the physical act of adultery, how many can say that they have never had unlawful sexual fantasies or impure thoughts? How many men have never stared at a beautiful young woman who was dressed inappropriately? How many people have not gazed upon provocative, unlawful images in magazines, or television or movies? Anyone who is honest with themselves will acknowledge that they are guilty before God, that they have violated the seventh commandment in their thought life and with their eyes. Therefore, it is obvious that, "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20). It is clear that we must assume a position of complete humility before God, admit our guilt and acknowledge the necessity of the Savior's sacrificial death to remove all of our sins. The more we understand the requirements of God's holy law, the more we will see our need of Christ. And having confessed our sin before God and embraced His Son through faith, we must live a daily repentance in this area and strive to avoid any occasion, place or thing which may inflame unlawful passions. With the psalmist we should pray, "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way" (Ps. 119:37).

### Christ's Instructions on How to Maintain Sexual Purity

After setting forth the proper interpretation of the seventh commandment, our Lord gives instructions on how to deal with and prevent these fleshly lusts. "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" (Mt. 5:29-30). There are a number of things about this passage that are noteworthy.

It is important that we understand that the command to pluck out the right eye or cut off the right hand is not meant to be taken literally. Some believers throughout history have not understood this fact and consequently have done themselves great bodily harm in attempting to follow this passage. A number of early church fathers had themselves castrated in order to subdue sexual lusts. Every so often, a story in the paper will appear about a young believer who attempted to cut off his right hand and ended up in the emergency room of the hospital. That Jesus has in mind drastic action to remove sin and not literal limbs can be ascertained from the fact that He only mentions the right eye and the right hand. A man can engage in unlawful sexual lust quite effectively with only one eye. He can still commit perverse sexual acts with only one hand. Indeed, a blind man with no hands at all can still commit adultery in his heart. The mention of the "right eye" or the "right hand" is probably designed to point us to that which is more important, useful or valuable in serving our illicit lusts. The right eye is in Jewish thinking the most important eye. The right hand is (at least for the vast majority of people) the most important hand. The Redeemer is using a dramatic figure of speech to emphasize the great lengths of self-mortification that we must be willing to undergo to deal with the things that cause us to sin. If there is any confusion regarding this interpretation, we only need to examine Matthew 18:7-9 where our Lord basically says the same thing but precedes it with an explanation. "From that passage it follows clearly that the eye and the hand that leads a person into sin symbolize and

represent ‘occasions of stumbling,’ or if one prefers, *enticements to do wrong, beguiling allurements.*”<sup>13</sup>

That Jesus is discussing the necessity of avoiding enticements to sin is also demonstrated by the expression “offend thee” (KJV) or “causes you to sin” (NKJV) in verses 29 and 30. The expression “*skandalizei se*” means literally “causes you to stumble.” The word *skandalon* in classical Greek referred to the stick in a trap to catch small animals. When the stick which was baited with food was touched by an animal, the trap would close ensnaring the animal. In later Greek it came to denote a stumbling block or anything on a path that would cause a person to trip and fall. “The present tense (*skandalizei*) brings the supposition home with great force to the hearer’s actual experience.”<sup>14</sup> What is it that is causing you to stumble? What is it that leads you into temptation and causes you to be trapped or overtaken by it? Jesus is telling us that whatever leads us into temptation and causes us to sin, no matter how precious to us, must be dealt with decisively and, therefore, with strenuous exertion removed from our lives. What then can be done by Christians to avoid falling into the sin of unlawful sexual lust and the sin of using our senses to stimulate this lust? There are a number of things that need to be done.

First, it is very important that we have a biblical understanding of God’s law and sin. The problem with the Jews in Christ’s day was that they held a very external understanding of what constitutes a sin. Therefore, as a result they were constantly violating Scripture without even being aware of it. In our day many evangelicals have such a light view of sin and negative view of God’s Old Testament moral law that they are often careless and frequently sin without even knowing it. Consequently, it is crucial that we heed the message of the Sermon on the Mount on the continuing validity of God’s moral law and the importance of understanding the internal aspect of God’s commandments. Do we take seriously our Lord’s teaching that it is not only the act, but also the unlawful desire and look that is offensive to God? Are we diligent in our study of Scripture so that our world and life view and ethic is the same as the Bible? We cannot mortify the sinful passions in our life if we do not know how to identify sin and we don’t understand the sinfulness of all sin (even internal sins) in God’s sight.

Second, we must identify people, places or things that have tempted us and/or caused us to sin in the past and completely avoid them. If a Christian man liked to go jogging on the beach and found his eyes focusing on bikini-clad women and this caused him to lust, then he must find another place to jog. If a college student would pass a newsstand on the way to school full of pornographic magazines and he was tempted to look at them and purchase some of them, then he needs to find another route to school. If a person finds that a television program fosters lust in his heart, then he has no business watching that program. Similarly, if a man is tempted to look at pornographic pictures on the internet, then he must keep the computer in a public area in the home with strong filters or he must get rid of the computer. As Paul says, “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:13-14). We must with the apostle, discipline our body and bring it into subjection otherwise we will be disapproved (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27). We must guard the eye gate with all diligence so that

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<sup>13</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 303. That our Lord does not refer to a literal maiming of the body is also proved by the analogy of Scripture. If Jesus were telling us to rip out an eye or cut off a hand then Scripture would contradict Scripture for as the seventh commandment applies to any unlawful thoughts, words or acts related to sexual immorality; the sixth commandment forbids all violence to others or ourselves. Self-flagellation, starving oneself to death, suicide and deliberate maiming are unlawful. Therefore, no Christian should rely on pliers or a chain saw to obey the Savior.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 142-143.

lust does not grow in our hearts. We must keep our hearts with all diligence and labor for purity of heart (Pr. 4:23). The key to success in this area is a premeditated plan to avoid sexual temptations altogether.

This means that we must be willing to part with anything, even our dearest possessions, if they tempt us to sin. We must even part company with our old unconverted friends, because evil companionship will corrupt our thinking and behavior (see Pr. 13:20; 28:7; 1 Cor. 15:33). “David says that ‘all his delight was in the saints, and in those who excelled in virtue.’ He ‘was a companion to all those who feared the name of God.’ As for the wicked, he would ‘not allow them to come into his sight,’ nay, ‘he would not make mention of them in his lips’ (Ps. 16:3; 119; 101:7).”<sup>15</sup>

All men know by experience what stimulates sexual lust and what does not. Only those who choose to live in self-deception or are full of pride will err in this area. Jesus says that whatever causes us to stumble must be ripped out of our lives. It must be cut off and cast behind our backs. The man who has been caught in a certain snare and knows the consequences of that trap, yet does it again and again is a fool and is putting his soul in great danger. It does not matter what we think our needs are or what our particular circumstances are. If something causes unlawful lust and offends God then we must hate it and put it out of our lives. Once a man looks at pornographic images, lascivious movies or reads filthy novels or articles he has demonstrated that his thought life is already tainted with impurity. His sinful actions on this issue make matters worse because he is getting more polluted by his actions. His entanglement becomes worse and his repentance will be even more difficult. We must be very diligent on this point because our depraved culture is obsessed with sexual perversions of every kind. Today, there are thousands of ways to cause sexual lust that did not exist only a generation ago. Gross debauchery is only a few keys away on our personal computers. Thus, we must never play with temptations. We must flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22) and instead pursue righteousness.

The whole point of Jesus’ illustration of ripping out the eye or cutting off the hand is to emphasize just how diligently we must be in avoiding temptation and sin. When it comes to sights that cause us to sin, we must behave as though we have no eyes. When it comes to sinning with our hands, we must live as an amputee. “Behave as if you actually cut off your hands and feet, and had flung them away, and were now crippled and so could not do the things or visit the places which previously caused you to sin.’ That is the meaning of ‘mortification.’”<sup>16</sup>

Third, we must have discipline and control over our thought life. A man can be enticed not only by sight, but also by lustful thoughts. “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (Jas. 1:14). This entails pushing out impure thoughts when they come into the mind and replacing them with lawful and edifying thoughts. There are seven things that can be done in this area.

(1) A man who is married must learn to replace illicit sexual thoughts with thoughts about his own wife. On two separate occasions, when Paul warned unmarried Christians about the temptation to fornication, he advocated marriage as the solution to sexual desire (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Thess. 4:3). This is the put off/put on principle of sanctification. That which is ungodly must be put off and replaced with a lawful counterpart. If a man has had trouble with sexual fantasies that are contrary to Scripture, then he must learn to focus his mind on his own wife. There is nothing unlawful about that. Further, it is important that Christian men maintain a

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<sup>15</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, “An Exposition of the Tenth Commandment” in Ernest Kevin, *Moral Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1991), 92.

<sup>16</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 89.

healthy sexual relationship with their own wives as a preventive measure against a wandering mind. “Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only for your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountains be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son be enraptured by an immoral woman?” (Pr. 5:15-20).

(2) If we are having impure thoughts then one thing that can be done is to occupy ourselves with some type of constructive work. In other words, we must avoid idleness. King David was idle when he was tempted to commit adultery. He was living in leisure and luxury instead of fighting for Zion. A mind that is occupied with good works and service to Christ will not have the time to wander into forbidden areas. “Idleness is the Devil’s pillow. An idle person is a standing puddle, apt to stagnate and putrefy. This makes the soil fit for Satan to sow his seed in. Therefore it was good counsel which said, Let Satan always find you alert and ready.”<sup>17</sup>

(3) On all such occasions we must focus our mind on the Word of God which is designed to convict the straying heart and purify it. “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.... Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:9, 11). If necessary, write on little cards all the appropriate biblical passages regarding unlawful lust and the dangers and consequences of fornication and adultery and study them precisely at the times of temptation. Occupy your mind with Scripture instead of unlawful sexual fantasies. “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

(4) We must learn to focus our minds on the intimate presence of God who is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab.1:13). “Never forget that his eye is on your heart, and that ‘all things are naked and opened’ to him; and, as one of the best and most effectual methods of mortifying your members which are on the earth—crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, ‘Set your affections on things above’; ‘Seek the things which are at God’s right hand’ [Col. 3:2-6].”<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason that Paul pleaded with the Corinthians not to take their bodies which are temples of the Holy Spirit and join them to a harlot (cf. 1 Cor. 6:15-18). Since our bodies are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, our minds and bodies cannot be polluted with filth without incurring great and peculiar guilt.

(5) We must do everything we can to hate that which we once loved. The psalmist says, “You that love the LORD, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10). Sinful lusts are contrary to everything God is. Therefore, we must look at sin as contrary to our love toward Christ. Anything that hinders our communion with the Savior must be viewed as horrible, detestable and wretched. The world views sin as a light thing, as trivial. It laughs at sin because it does not fear God. But we must understand how wicked sin is in God’s sight and train ourselves to see it as God does. “Look at it; read the biblical description of it; analyze it; and the more we do so the more we shall hate it and do all we can to get rid of it at all costs, and to destroy it out of our lives.”<sup>19</sup> Do you love God? If you do then you will do everything you can to hate sin and mortify it every day.

(6) In all these things we must always be looking to Christ and His completed work. Paul tells us to look to our union with the Savior in His death and resurrection as the source of our

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<sup>17</sup> Lancelot Andrewes, 92.

<sup>18</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 1:194.

<sup>19</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:247.

holiness and renewal. “Likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:11-13). To play with lust in the mind and lust with the eyes is totally contrary to our new creation in Christ. It is not who we are.

(7) There is also the need to be continually praying for the grace to govern our appetites. Only the power and help of the Holy Spirit can deliver us from this sin. Paul says, “It is by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Jesus says that watching against sin and temptation must always be accompanied by prayer. “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation” (Mt. 26:41). Oh Lord, deliver us from this vile soul destroying temptation so that we would not sin against thee!

Fourth, our Lord gives a very sober, weighty reason why we must be willing to put away anything that would cause us to sin in this area. He says it would be better to be blinded and maimed than to be cast into hell. The logic here is impeccable for those who have eyes to see the truth. Does it not make sense to suffer pain and loss in this present life which is temporary and will soon pass away, in order to avoid the terrors of the lake of fire which is eternal and shall inflict suffering on both body and soul? This reasoning is in keeping with another message on the cost of discipleship. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28). “Who is there among us who would not consent to the amputation of a gangrened limb, no matter how painful the operation and heavy the loss, if persuaded that this was imperative in order for life itself to be preserved?”<sup>20</sup> Of course, the stakes are much higher than preserving our lives in the present. The choice is between mortification in this present life as a fruit of saving faith and not simply physical death, but eternal death. We can mortify the flesh now and suffer for the Savior or we can spend eternity in torment.

According to Christ, believers are to view the present life through the lens of the final judgment and eternity. Everything we do in this world must be done with a consideration of how it relates to the eternal destiny of our souls. This does not mean that we are saved by works or that our present life is not important. It rather keeps us focused on preparing for the final judgment and the eternal state to follow. Are we living as though we really believe that Jesus is coming to judge the quick and the dead? Do we live our lives carelessly as though we are not really concerned about our eternal destiny? Our Lord says that everything in this world is much less important than what happens to our souls when we die. The perspective of eternity should affect all of our thinking. When we look at the rewards of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked and compare it to the sacrifices that we make in this present life to serve Christ, there is no comparison. Thus, the pain of mortification is sweetened by heaven. There is no pleasure or power or glory in this present life that is worth the price of hell.

All of this runs completely counter to our modern culture, which is very permissive and demands instant gratification. We must be willing to forego the sinful pleasures of this world in order to enter the paradise of God. This teaching requires real faith because it requires diligent self-denial and purity in the present on the basis of the Redeemer’s promises for the distant future. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is something that demonstrates whether we are a true Christian or not. If we live for this world and not the next, then we know that our faith is dead and worthless. If we live for the world to come, then we can have peace and assurance of

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 90.

salvation. Beloved, examine yourselves to see your true priority, your true love. If you have been deluding yourselves and living for this present world, then now is the time to repent and follow Christ.

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