

## **Covenant Love: God's Response to Lust**

Faculty Series Spring 2018 - Matthew 5:27-32

### **Introduction**

Greetings President, Dean Howell & Administration. Faculty. Students. My wife. Mom and Grandma and anyone else watching. Yes, my mom and grandma are watching. Pastor Ben, you are either very confident or lack wisdom. ☺ I am very grateful to be a part of this great school and count it a very high honor to not only teach God's word here, but to be able to share in this series.

When we had decided upon the topics for the faculty series, to be honest this was the topic that I wanted to speak on the least. But I knew that I could probably speak best to it, so I was the first to volunteer to speak on the topic of lust. It is something that has brought pain to my life, it is something I have battled with and by God's grace continue to gain victory over. I pray almost daily this prayer, "Lord, keep my eyes & my heart on You, Your Word, and my wife."

I as studied this out I became increasingly aware of the vast differences of opinion on this topic, especially the topic of divorce and remarriage. As hinted at yesterday, it is hard to say anything with a concrete answer. I will give you my thoughts and perspectives on this matter. I will do my very best to represent what I believe to be God's heart on this matter and the soundest viewpoint concerning the Scriptures. My conclusions may not be easy, but they will be good.

My methodology for today's sermon will be to look at a biblical understanding of the word lust/desire, look at Matt 5:27-32 and gain an understanding of that passage, and then do our best to bring application to the words of Christ in our modern context as it pertains to lust and marriage relationships. In the midst of all this, and as time permits, I will weave my personal story into it in hopes that it will encourage you and help you in your walk of purity before the Lord.

**Matt 5:27-32**(BPV – Ben Phillips Translation – [my translation of the Greek text])

<sup>27</sup>You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, take it out and throw it from you. For it is better for you to lose one of your body parts, and not your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it from you. For it is better for you that you lose one of your body parts, and not your whole body go into hell. <sup>31</sup> It was said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give to her a certificate of divorce. <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of sexual immorality, makes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

### **The Problem of Lust**

I am the product of much prayer. I would not be here apart from the countless prayers given on my behalf. I would not be who I am apart from those who have poured into my life. But as is with most people, not everything poured into me was good.

My dad inadvertently introduced me to pornography when I was about 11-12 years old. In central Pennsylvania in the 90's we did not recycle our trash, we burned it. That was one of my chores. I would stand out by the fire and make sure it did not spread into the woods. I would usually just play in it. One

time while doing so, I came across some unburned pornographic magazines that my dad had attempted to burn. Most of them had burned, but there were a few pictures left. That was the beginning of a very long and shameful road.

This struggle that I had was only made worse with the advent of the internet. Statistically, more than 70% of the internet's bandwidth is used for pornography.

If you have ever struggled or are even now struggling with lust and pornography, then you know the feelings of shame. You feel like a hypocrite. I remember as a teen staying up way too late on a Saturday night watching junk on the television or viewing trash on the internet, only to get up the next morning and go to church. I didn't want to go. Not because I despised church, but because of my sin. I wasn't worthy to step into the house of God and sing of his goodness, love, and forgiveness because I had spent it up.

For years this was my story. How could God forgive me again when I knew that I would only fail again? I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that before the next time I was in church, I would be in front of that computer looking at the same trash. That wasn't repentance, it was hypocrisy and the life of sin. I cannot tell you the number of times in brokenness and longing that I read and prayed Psalm 51.

**Psalm 51** Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight... <sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. <sup>7</sup> Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your Presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

I was stuck in a very difficult place. I knew my actions were wrong. I hated my actions, but I could not keep myself from them. I knew God loved me and had a plan for me and had provided a means of escape, but I was unable and unwilling to find the way out. I was too ashamed and too afraid to confess my sin, but I desperately needed help. I could not foresee a way out and began to believe the lie that there was no way out.

Let's pause my story and take a look at the word in our text that is translated as "lust."

## The Word Defined by Scripture

### Definition

Today is *Mardi Gras*, or Fat Tuesday. If ever there was a day in which the desire, lust, and pleasure are celebrated, it is today.

A literal reading of our text in verse 28 says, "everyone who is looking towards a woman for the purpose of/with reference to lust..." Lust in the Greek is *epithumeo* as a verb & *epithumia* as a noun. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology defines it as desire, longing, greed, craving, lust – expresses man's inner striving for an objective which may be a person, a thing, or an experience.

Notice students, I used a Bible dictionary to define a Bible word. Not Webster, not dictionary.com, not Wikipedia, not Google.

## Usage

### Morally indifferent

Desire is neither good nor bad. In fact, God has given you the capacity to desire, without which you would not survive. Hopefully, you all have a desire to live?

**Deuteronomy 12:20** "When the LORD your God extends your border as He has promised you, and you say, 'I will eat meat,' because you desire to eat meat, *then* you may eat meat, whatever you desire.

You have the desire to eat, drink, breath, fellowship. All these are good and God given. Even sex is God-given desire. He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. The existence of the human race would not continue except for the God-given desire to do so. And everyone said, "Amen."

### Praiseworthy desire

One can desire the things of God

**Psalms 119:40** Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me through Your righteousness.

**Matthew 13:17** "For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see *it*, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it*.

**Philippians 1:23** But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;

### Evil desire

Here is where sin has taken God's goodness and twisted it, perverted it, and moved it beyond the borders of what God intended.

**James 1:14-15** <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. <sup>15</sup> Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

**Galatians 5:16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

For Paul, *epithumia* (desire/longing/lust) is the driving force in man's *sarx*, his flesh. In such, sinful man has turned from God and seeks gratification outside the boundaries God has established. Paul commands us to walk in the Spirit – live your life in the Spirit. By doing this, we do not then complete the second half of the verse – we will not carry out – *teleo* – bring to an end, carry out, complete the desires of the flesh.

**Galatians 5:24** Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

This is the answer to the issue of lust, I will come back to it at the end;

### **Matthew 5:27-32**

#### Hard and Difficult Sayings

Originally, I was only supposed to speak on Matt 5:27-30. I asked to include verses 31-32. I'm happy I did because they bring a much fuller understanding to this issue. As such, we need to understand the concepts of marriage and divorce if we are to better grapple with what Jesus is saying concerning lust.

**Matthew 5:31-32** "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';<sup>32</sup> but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

**Matthew 19:3-9 (NASB)** <sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" <sup>4</sup> And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,<sup>5</sup> and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'?" <sup>6</sup> "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. <sup>9</sup> "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

This is not an easy passage because taking it at face value it is calling a very large portion of the human race adulterers, even though they have never actually cheated on their spouse. Is Jesus really saying that if things don't work out, you get a divorce, and remarry that you are an adulterer? Yes, I think he is. You need to understand that what he is saying in these passages are "hard & difficult" sayings.

These hard sayings are part of what the Sermon on the Mount is all about; Kingdom ethics, what does life look like for the person who has responded to the Gospel and now lives in the kingdom? Your salvation is offered to you freely, but it will cost you to live in the Kingdom. Those who follow Christ are going to be called to a higher standard. Jesus did not die on the cross so that you could stay in your sin, but he died to set you free from that sin and transform you into His image.

#### Biblical Understanding of Marriage: Contract vs. Covenant

Divorce was as prevalent in Jesus day as it is today. The Pharisees appeal to Moses and the law for the basis of their argument. Jesus says, that's nice, and he appeals to the way that God established it from the very beginning. This is the way it was supposed to be, but because your hearts are hard, God made provisions to protect the innocent. Here is the problem: God calls marriage a covenant – man treats it like a contract

"A contract joins two parties in an agreement regarding a mutual obligation. If either person fails to provide a particular benefit, the contract may be renegotiated. If marriage were a contractual agreement, the end of reciprocity might rightly mark the death of the

relationship. But marriage is not a contract. Marriage is a covenant.” “Marriage, Covenant or Contract?” *JFM*, Timothy Paul Jones, 5.

Contracts can be dissolved, but I am going to suggest that covenants, specifically where God is involved, and even more specifically marriage covenants, cannot be dissolved and are therefore permanent until released by death. Point: Covenant is permanent.

God covenanted with Israel. If God had treated his relationship with Israel like a contract and not a covenant, then God’s would have been done with Israel a long time ago. But what do we see? God ALWAYS remains faithful to his people, even when they are faithless toward him. The language the Bible uses to describe the relationship between God and his people is that of a marriage.

**Isaiah 54:5** "For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts;

**Revelation 21:2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Jeremiah gives us insight to this relationship and shows a faithful God and a faithless bride

**Jeremiah 3:1** *God* says, "If a husband divorces his wife And she goes from him And belongs to another man, Will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot *with* many lovers; Yet you turn to Me," declares the LORD.

**Jeremiah 3:8** <sup>8</sup> "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce,

**Deuteronomy 24:3-4** <sup>3</sup> and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, <sup>4</sup> then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

God, technically, by his own law is not allowed to take Israel back because she was his, she committed adultery, He divorced her, and she belonged to another. But what is the cry of God to his bride?

**Jeremiah 3:12** "Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever.

**Jeremiah 3:22** "Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness."

**Jeremiah 4:1** If you will return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "*Then* you should return to Me.

The relationship that God has with his people is not a contract, it is a binding covenant, ratified in sacrifice and the shedding of blood, which can only be dissolved by the death of the participants.

**Romans 11:1** I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!

What takes place in the making of a covenant? (in short)

1. Declaration of Oaths – I will do such and such
2. Shedding of blood by cutting of flesh in two – usually an animal

3. Party passes through the cut pieces of flesh declaring before God that may they become like this animal (torn in two) if they fail to uphold their part of the covenant.
4. The covenant is binding, being ratified by blood and the only way to be released is by death

We see this in Genesis 15 where God makes a covenant with Abram. Abram cuts the animals in two, but God causes Abram to sleep and it is God alone who passes through the animals, hence being the only responsible party in the covenant.

### **Scripture Calls Marriage a Covenant**

<sup>ESV</sup> **Malachi 2:13-15** <sup>13</sup>You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. <sup>14</sup> But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?

Marriage is a Covenant which is ratified when the couple comes together in sexual union and it carries all the same duties and actions of the covenant ceremony. Forgive me for getting graphic here, but you need to understand the seriousness behind this.

Just like covenant oaths, you say vows to your spouse as you stand before God. The covenant is ratified by the flesh of the animal being cut or torn in two and the shedding of blood and the passing through of the party between the pieces. The way God intended it to be is that a virgin man and virgin come together in marriage and that marriage is ratified in the act of sex. Physically in the woman there is a piece of skin that is torn, and blood is shed when the man passes through and two quite literally become one flesh. There is a sacrifice of themselves as they give of their virginity and give of their bodies to one another exclusively for the remainder of their lives until death frees them from the covenant bond.

Here is the point! Covenants are permanent. God has established it from the beginning that marriage is a permanent covenant that is only dissolved by death. He himself has shown himself to be faithful in upholding his end of the covenant even when his people did not. In God's eyes, divorce does not nullify or dissolve the original covenant.

So when Jesus says that you divorce your wife and remarry – you commit adultery, He means it. Why? Because the one to whom you entered into a covenant with is still alive and in God's eyes that covenant is still binding, therefore when you have sex with someone else, even within the "bonds" of marriage, you are breaking your original covenant vow in which you gave your body to one person and one person alone, therefore you are committing what God calls adultery. Be careful who you marry.

### **Lust: What's the Big Deal?**

Here now is the problem with lust. It is quite simple. God says if you have sex with any person other than the one you entered into a covenant relationship with apart from your spouse being dead, you commit adultery. Jesus says, you don't have to go through the physical motions of adultery. When you look at someone and lust after them, you are committing the act in your heart and that, in God's eyes, is the same thing. You are a citizen of the Kingdom of God and such actions and thoughts and intents of the heart are not acceptable. You have been called to a higher standard. Lust is an issue of the heart

## God's Response: Covenant Love

I read a verse in Jeremiah that I am going to read again because I want you to see something.

**Jeremiah 4:1** If you will return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "Then you should return to Me.

If you will return...how? If history is an indicator of the future, then the forecast is bleak. God's bride is consistently unfaithful and prone to sin. Once again, God must step in and show his never-ending love for his people. Lust, unfaithfulness, SIN – it is an issue of the heart, and mankind's heart is prone to sin, unfaithfulness, etc.

**Jeremiah 24:7** <sup>7</sup> 'I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.

**Jeremiah 31:31-33** "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** <sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Here is the problem with this. God is speaking marriage language. God is speaking covenant language. "My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them." How can God enter into a new covenant relationship when there is a current covenant relationship? The only way out of a covenant is death.

I appeal now, as Paul did, back to Abraham - **Galatians 3:17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God. Have your minds raced forward yet? When God entered into covenant with Abraham, who passed through and entered the Covenant? God did. Who is the only one held to the stipulations of the Covenant? God is. Who has to die in order for there to be an end of one covenant so that a new one can be inaugurated? God does. God dies in the person of Jesus Christ. With his death, with the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood, the old covenant passes and the new covenant begins.

Why a new covenant? God has always been able to forgive sin, but his bride could not live in obedience to his Law. The new covenant is inaugurated so that God's people will be filled with His Holy Spirit and enabled to carry out the requirements of old covenant. You can obey God's laws because His presence dwells in you and empowers you to do so. You can overcome the desires of the flesh because the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

**Galatians 5:16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

## **Dealing with Lust: Practical Application**

I asked my wife to give me some insight on this issue, because ladies, she can better speak to you as a woman to this issue than I can as a man. And guys, she can speak to you from a woman's perspective. I will let you know when the content is hers.

### **Remove the problem**

Jesus said pluck your eye out & cut off your hand

My wife says, "if you know it's your downfall, don't put yourself in situations you know you might have trouble with."

Computer, phone, if you need to get rid of it for a while. Better that than sin.

Don't be on your device alone.

Don't "browse/surf" with intentions of accidentally finding something

Dating couples – how far can you go? Not far. Stay in public. Don't be alone. Don't do anything you wouldn't do in front of the Dean of Students. Leave room for the Holy Spirit and leave room for Dean Munley.

### **Recognize the Consequences & Prioritize your Goals**

Jesus points to hell

Undealt-with sin is a barrier between us and God – sin separates us. Separation from God finds its end fulfillment in Hell.

You cannot be an effective proclaimer of the Kingdom with a lifestyle of sin.

If your goal is an anointed and effective life and ministry then you will need to begin to live a life of righteousness before the Lord.

Amber says, "who means the most to you? God, your spouse, your children, or yourself?"

### **Seek Accountability & Help Each Other**

You need to be accountable to someone.

You need to confess your sin and find help.

We do not do that out of fear.

My fear, is you don't deal with this now and you carry this into your marriage and ministry. Let's deal with it now and find healing and wholeness now.

Men, you are visual beings. Truth, but never an excuse. Ladies. Help out the guys. My wife says to you, "We live in a world that says if you've got it, flaunt it. Don't tell me it is your right to wear what you want. It is your right as a Christian woman to be helping Christian men not to stumble."

She also says, "There should be nothing more desirable to a man than seeing a woman praying and seeking God. That's how you should be turning heads."

Walk alongside each other. You need each other's help in this. Encourage, pray for, and help carry each other's burdens.

### **Walk in the Spirit**

You need to be in the presence of the Lord

I've posted a document on Northpoint's list to print and put in your Bible. Tomorrow starts Lent. It is a 40-day reading schedule to read through the New Testament between now and Easter. Lent is about seeking God in prayer and drawing close to him in preparation for celebrating the resurrection. Part of that is often the giving up or fasting of things. If you have struggled with lust I encourage you to draw close to the Lord over the course of the next 6 ½ weeks. What if this season of preparation and seeking the Lord helped you to break the addiction in your life?

#### Resources:

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