

Lent 2, 2018

The Church Through the Eyes of Adultery

Matthew 5:27-37

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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” (vs. 27-28).

It was on Mt. Sinai where God shown forth His glory and as the mountain rumbled and quaked he gave Moses the Law and herein we read, *“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Exodus 20:18).* I remind you of these words from Exodus so that it does not fall lightly on your ears that what God commands comes with ultimate authority...there is no higher court. And when we listen to our Gospel reading today we must listen with that same fear, for it is God in human flesh who elaborates to us the depth of His commands that we may be able to see the extent of the permeation of sin.

It would be simple for us, as it was for the Pharisees, to look at the commandments in their original tablet form and say I have not done any of these things; I have never killed anyone, I don't steal and, well, as far as coveting I don't like anything my neighbor has anyway. And so we see ourselves in the clear...at least we may try and justify it that way. But Jesus doesn't let us get away with that does He? In Matthew's Gospel Jesus opens the Jewish scriptures to expose more brightly the light that resides within the law. Sin, Jesus would tell us, lies not merely in the act, but also in the very thoughts of mankind. The propensity to sin is within us all regardless of our actions...therefore we are all sinners, sinners convicted by every commandment.

We all know what it means to break the commands of God and fall into the remnants of sin, but it was God in Flesh and blood who enlightened

us that the mere thoughts of our hearts was enough to constitute the sin God forbids... *“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”* Let me ask you this; why do you think the Ten Commandments are being challenged and removed from public view and adoration? Could it be that God’s commands convict the souls of all mankind in a direction opposed to our modern day social inclinations? Yes, even Christians are falling prey to social movements devised by the devil himself to separate us from God! The very roots of God’s covenantal promises to us extend into our very hearts and it is here also where we can allow ourselves to be deceived. Remember the great question posed to Eve in the Garden, *“Did God really say...?”* Why is the lust of our hearts a danger even when not acted on? Most of society and even many of our Christian brothers and sisters would say that the thought is far from the act and therefore not a sin. So, what’s the point of Jesus’s words to us when he says *“that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?”* Well, for the same reason we don’t allow a child to play with a knife. If we allow such a dangerous situation to persist at some point the weapon will be fatal...it is only a matter of time. It is best to keep the knife sheathed in prayer were sin can be dealt with and forgiven.

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out...If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off: for it is more profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (vs. 29-30).

Let us here read with clarity. I don’t want any of you to start plucking out your eyes and cutting off hands. The body spoken of here is the body of Christ...the Christian church. I know there have been extreme accounts of bodily mutilations because of this verse being taken literally. But those with eyes to see and hands to grasp understand the analogy. And to offend would be to go against the proper teachings of God’s word and commandments, things beyond hurt feelings. The church has gone through many changes as the age of the Apostles has passed. Many heresies have been dealt with and some of their proponents have even been excommunicated from the church. This is exactly what we are being taught in these verses. One would think that after so much time the whole body of Christ would be united in one pristine essence of the Father’s glory, but it is not so. Time tells us that

the devil is always at work to deceive. In an interview I saw with an Episcopal priest, the modern day social gospel was exposed without trepidation. This particular priest is advocating for a gender-neutral bible and liturgy to be used within the church. Never have we seen such a mockery of the Holy Scriptures. When asked how gender neutrality could be advocated for when we read in Genesis 1 that God *“created Man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”* (Gen. 1:27) the Priest’s in answer referenced Genesis 2 where God made Adam a ‘helper’ pointing out that this ‘helper’ is not gender specific (of course he left out the rest of the chapter which refers to this helper as female). Should the Early Church Fathers be rolling in their graves? Are we giving up God’s Law for man’s doctrine? God’s Word has become free game to social interests that would destroy the very foundation of the True Church. Is this a part of the body about to be plucked out or cut off? Well...if they feel it necessary to manipulate God’s Word to appease themselves...Scalpel please...

Next we heard today that *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery”* (vs. 31-32). Interesting. Five verses earlier Jesus tells us *“...that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...”* (vs. 22). There are times when we can act on the sinfulness of others and call sin...sin. Adultery within a marriage contract is grounds for action. But, Sin perpetuates itself when we act on it inappropriately. If we are simply trying to lighten our own burdens we must be aware that without just cause we may not only cause others to sin but fall into sin ourselves. If a man divorces a faithful wife because she has faults does he not deny his own faults? Galatians 6:2 tells us to *“bare one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* And what is the law of Christ? To love God and to love each other. Absent a direct and willful disobedience of God’s command to be faithful, we are to lift each other up, come to the rescue and show compassion. We must be careful not to defile others because of self-centered inclinations and misguided leanings.

Finally, we are told in verses 33-37, and I paraphrase, “not to swear in oaths by heaven or by earth or by the great city Jerusalem; for by uttering more than yea or nay we are easily corrupted”. Here is our human nature exposed. Although we see through the glass darkly we still have the propensity to see ourselves as wise and therefore most susceptible to the devil’s guidance. Modern day theology is said to be accommodating more and more revelations from God in the interpretation of scripture. So much so that some are finding it necessary to alter God’s Word to make it more acceptable to the masses. Based on the direction of many mainstream churches one must ask, how long can we stand in these tainted waters without calling sin...sin?

We must hold ourselves accountable to scripture and of the writings and councils of the early church where, being closest to the source of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, we can be confident of the truth. May we admit our propensity to sin, distance ourselves of those doctrines that separate us from God, avoid unjust judgmentalism, and acknowledge our limited understanding. I leave you with these words from Cassiodorus (Roman writer and monk 5th -6th century):

“The prayer that frees us from faults wins the heart of the judge and wipes away sins; mercy cannot be withheld from the one who asks for it, as humility fires us to pray unceasingly for forgiveness. All this is achieved by the devoted Lord, for he does not wish to condemn those whom he forewarns.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.