

Guilty of What!? 2-29-04

Matthew 5:27-32 (NIV)

²⁷"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'²⁸But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³²But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

We are continuing our series through the Sermon on the Mount. We heard those impossible beatitudes that are a description of the life of Christ. He followed that by telling the disciples to be salt and light in the world system that is flavorless and dark. Then Jesus began to illuminate the Law. He was not doing away with it but fulfilling it. He was fulfilling not only the letter but the Spirit of it as well. He started with the legal view of murder and showed that God looked beyond the actions down into the heart. Instead of widening the loopholes that man creates whenever there are rules, He tightened the definition to the extent that no one could keep it. We discovered to our horror that we may indeed be guilty before God of murder in the sense that we have had the root of anger in our hearts willingly nurtured and kept aflame. Our mouths may have uttered harsh things against others, and we found that is not in keeping with God's character. It is expressing an insult towards God's creation. We held the personal offense against the sinner instead of the sin that enslaved them. In all this we realize that we all fall far short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Jesus continues, in our passage today, to deepen and expand upon the Law. It had to be utterly shocking to His listeners because of the reverence they had for the Law, and yet, they must have known that what He was saying was indeed true. No one dared challenge Him on His bold authoritative statements.

This just gets more and more depressing as Jesus continues pointing out the depravity of our hearts. Most of His listeners probably thought they were pretty good Jews. The disciples will argue who among them is the greatest, but Jesus is breaking down our misconception of righteousness. He is taking us from that outwardly visible realm to the realm of the spirit in which the eyes of Almighty God peer deep into our very heart's motivations. The author of Hebrews writes, "*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*" Hebrews 4:13 (NIV) The term the author used in Greek was sometimes used of a person being sentenced. A knife was held under the chin to lift the head up so that the person had to look into the penetrating gaze of the one who examined him eye-to-eye.

We think we would like to peer into the eyes of our loving Father until we hear Jesus' perception of the depth of God's righteousness. Then we are not so sure we

Commented [notes1]: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23 (NIV)

want our heavenly Father looking down into the depths of our soul. In the touchy feely world of self-glorifying religions, we need to hear anew Jesus' definition of good and evil and realize that any righteousness that we have, we find in Him alone. If God's standard were any less than perfection, He would be less than perfect Himself. He isn't too demanding, for He demands what is right and just.

After speaking on murder, Jesus addressed adultery. First He quotes the Law from (Exodus 20:14). But then He gives them that view from heaven that looks down into the heart and mind and sees spiritual reality. You don't have to act it out to be guilty of it. Rebellion in your mind against God's standard is rebellion. None of this, "well, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone" business. Every man in prison on sexual charges is there because the sin began in his mind and heart long before he ever acted on it. The men that heard Jesus must have cringed as He gave this expanded definition of adultery. Any honest man that ever read this chapter with an ear to hear must either harden his heart or realize that he is guilty of adultery by Jesus' standards. Women, just because Jesus didn't address you here, don't think you are off the hook. By this same principle, every woman that allows her mind to fantasize about that hunk on the soaps or in that romance novel being your knight in shining armor is guilty as well.

Now that we know we are not only murderers, but adulterers as well, we start to see that we need a Savior. I can't help it if you don't agree with Jesus' standard. It just goes to show you that you have a problem, not that Jesus' standard is too tough. If you walked on water and raised the dead, I might be interested in your standard of right and wrong, what is and what is not acceptable. But since you can't do any of that, why should I listen to you or me for that matter? We need the opinion of someone who knows where God stands. It is God that will judge us by His own standard. Ignorance of the Law is no excuse either, for He put the Law in our hearts. (Romans 2:15) We know we are wrong when we are angry. We know we are evil when we look on a woman to lust after her. We might not think it is worthy of the penalty of death, but God does, and what He thinks is what matters. Mankind is lost without a Savior!

Who killed Jesus? This is the big question in the media over the movie The Passion of the Christ. Mel Gibson knew. It was his hand holding the nail in the film. Rembrandt knew. The Roman soldier that is pulling up the cross in his painting is a self-portrait. Do you know? As I watched the movie I had to keep saying to myself, "For me! He's doing that for me." Our culture has conditioned us to see ourselves as pretty good. We see so much darkness in the news media that we tend to think we must be some of the best people in the world. Then you see the Passion of Christ and realize your self-perception is totally out of whack if He had to endure such suffering to make you right with God. It's my sins that are being dealt with in His body. Mine!

I should have seen the movie before I recommended it to you. Forgive me if you were offended. It is too brutal for sensitive souls. I don't think it happened just as Gibson portrayed it, I think it was worse, but that is just my opinion. Isaiah said people would be appalled at how disfigured the Messiah would become and that His form would be marred beyond human likeness. (Isaiah 52:14) What do those words look like in your mind? It is just my opinion that Jesus only received 39 lashes, (Romans sometimes kept to Jewish traditions so as not to cause unnecessary

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.
Exodus 20:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁴Just as there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness--
Isaiah 52:14 (NIV)

rioting) not 120, and those I believe were on His back as prophesied (Isaiah 50:6). But I also believe those lashes shredded His back much more severely than was depicted. The point isn't the exact details of what He suffered. The point is that my sin is so deplorable to a holy God who Himself is the epitome of goodness, that justice demanded that penalty in my place. God cannot be unjust. Our sins had to be punished, so He stepped in and took it for us. Are our sins really that bad?

This week someone asked about Caleb's surgery and how soon his dear little face will look more like ours. When I told them he would look pretty normal by the time he starts school, they were relieved because in their words, "Children can be so cruel." Why is it 5 year olds can say such heartless evil things that can scar a person's soul for life? It isn't because they are born innocent! David cried out penitently, "*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" (Psalms 51:5) He knew he needed a Savior.

In this passage we are looking at, Jesus is helping the Jewish listener get past their deceived thinking about their self-righteousness so that they see the need to repent. They could self-righteously shake their finger at a murder or adulterer until Jesus said they were guilty of the same. Did the horror of guilt before God cause them to hang their heads in shame, or did they put it in the back of their mind as something that nothing could be done about? Is it getting through to the 21st century reader? Fellow murderers and adulterers, we are saved by grace through faith in what Jesus did!

As people watch the movie and ask if it was the Jews or Romans or religious system that killed Jesus, they need to hear His own words, "*I am come that you might have life. I give my life a ransom for many.*" (John 10:10) (Matthew 20:28) It is because we have chosen anger, chosen to look, willfully, even when we sensed it was wrong, in defiance of God and His goodness that is why Jesus was nailed to the cross. You might think you are good, but look at Jesus' standard and you can't continue to hold that opinion. You, I and every living person needs a Savior. Who killed Jesus? He laid down His life in love for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. By His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5) It was for my sins that He went to that horribly shameful and painful death, because I am a murderer and an adulterer.

But it is also through the power of the resurrection from that death that I too live a new life in Him! Once I see my condition as God sees it, I go to the cross and die with Him, but I do not stop there. I go on to be raised to newness of life in Him. (Romans 6:8) We are seated with Him in the heavenlies at the right hand of the throne of God. (Ephesians 2:6) Now, sin is no longer my master. (Romans 6:14) I can choose not to cling to anger. I can choose not to look lustfully. I can choose because resurrection power is at work in me, changing my desires and motivations, giving me strength in my inner man to stand for what is right.

I can't pass this subject without commenting on the terrible scourge pornography has brought upon the men of this nation. It has caused the fall of many pastors; it has invaded our homes through the Internet. It is addicting as any drug. It is destroying homes and inciting crimes. If you need help to break free from its grip, get help. You can say NO! By the power of the Spirit, but if you need some tools to equip you with helpful intervention methods, come to talk with me or see a counselor. Don't justify it. It is adultery and idolatry. Idolatry is putting God's creation before God Himself. I

Commented [notes5]: ⁶I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.
Isaiah 50:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 10:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
Isaiah 53:5 (KJV)

Commented [notes9]: ⁸Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
Romans 6:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,
Ephesians 2:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.
Romans 6:14 (NIV)

don't want to dwell on this subject, but let me sum it up by saying, vote to make it illegal in all forms, take action against it, refuse to let it in your home. Warn your children at the proper age against it. Check on them to make sure it is not capturing their minds. If they get on the Internet, be sure and use a filter and history. Block the channels on your TV and know what they are watching.

Most of all set an example. God doesn't mean for us to be prudes. The human body is a beautiful creation. You instinctively know the difference between what is art and what is evil. Because of your personal strengths or weaknesses, the line may not be the same for you as it is for someone else. Pay attention to your God given instincts, but especially to when the Spirit of God taps on your shoulder.

God is serious about being with you through eternity and He wants you to be just as serious about being with Him.

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³⁰*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

The Lord is not telling us to practice self-mutilation. He is telling us that whatever hinders us in our life, whatever causes us to sin, must go. (Galatians 5:24) Does your TV need to go? Something in your daily routine? Perhaps it is a relationship? Perhaps it is an attitude. Sin is such a serious thing that you should take whatever measure is necessary to be free of it. He'll repeat this again in chapter 18 to make sure we heard. Matthew wasn't wasting parchment.

We can learn from Jesus' expression that **we** must do something. Jesus told us to cut it off. God won't do it for us. I've heard of people praying to be delivered from the desire for a drug. Sometimes, in His mercy, God will do for you what you can't do for yourself. More often than not, He wants you to take the steps with His help to learn to make wise choices and take control of your life with the Spiritual fruit of self-discipline. Get serious! Take some drastic measures. It is that important! Show God you want to spend eternity with Him. God is more concerned about your eternal condition than your temporal happiness.

³¹*"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'* ³²*But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

Moses allowed men to divorce their wives. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) All that was required was a written certificate. In that culture, a woman could not earn a living. They were all supported by men. To become a widow meant that unless your husband left you enough money, you would starve or beg. We saw a similar condition under the Taliban in Afghanistan. A divorcee did not have a very good chance of remarrying. She needed to remarry if she was going to survive. Survival often meant prostitution but prostitution was punishable by death.

Just as in the laws about murder and adultery, Jesus tightened the loophole on divorce. He took it from being for just about any reason, to being only allowed for marital unfaithfulness. (Mark 10:2-9) Jesus was not about to let men just use

Commented [notes12]: ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.
Galatians 5:24 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,
²and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man,
³and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies,
⁴then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.
Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ²Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"
³"What did Moses command you?" he replied.
⁴They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."
⁵"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.
⁶"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'
⁷'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,
⁸and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one.
⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."
Mark 10:2-9 (NIV)

women and throw them away. Luke's gospel emphasizes Jesus' concern for women. Women helped to support His ministry. Some of His outer disciples were women. (Luke 8:1-3) This was highly unusual for a teacher of Jesus' day. He healed women and responded to their requests. He raised the dead son of a widow, perhaps because He was the only one that could provide for her. (Luke 7:14-15) Jesus cared about women just as much as men because they are as priceless in His eyes.

In the previous tightening of the legal loopholes, Jesus was implicating us all. In this passage, though, He is specifically indicting the men of His culture and of any culture that would not consider the life a woman as a precious thing to God. He was declaring that the man who forced his wife out of the home and from under his provision and protection was guilty of her act of adultery in remarrying. The sin was on his head. He couldn't blame her for not staying single when he quit providing for her. The man who married the divorcee, then, got her first husband out of his commitment to her, so he too is guilty.

Let me add that if you are a divorcee and are feeling condemned because of a previous situation or decisions, give it to the Lord. He does not want you to wallow in condemnation. You can't change the past. His desire is for you to be fully His today. Learn from past mistakes. Statistically speaking, every divorce increases your chance of divorcing again. Make sure that is not true of you. Give the past to God. Give the present to God. Be more committed to His will today than ever.

The Hebrews, Romans, and Greeks all had an easy divorce system for the men. It was the ruin of their cultures. It encouraged unfaithfulness and the destruction of the home, and when the home is destroyed, the nation will eventually follow. It is a shame that we do not learn from history. For the first five hundred years of the Roman commonwealth there is not a single record of divorce. Though Rome conquered Greece militarily, Greece conquered Rome morally. By the second century BC the morals of Rome were in such decline that there were as many divorces as marriages. The ruin of the home was the eventual ruin of the nation.

People of God, guard your passions. Husbands love your wives and treat them with respect. (Colossians 3:19) Let them know how much they are loved in demonstrable ways. Wives, honor your husbands. (Ephesians 5:33) Speak highly of those attributes you admire in one another. (Hebrews 3:13) Strengthen your home, because marriage is ordained of God and pleasing to Him.

We've covered a number of topics in today's message so let's review. As good as we may think we are, everyone of us is in need of repentance. Our hearts are no different from the murderer or adulterer. We need a Savior! It is only by His righteousness, and His willingness to take our punishment, that we are made right with God.

We should eliminate from our lives anything that is causing us to sin. Anything we need to cut off from our life is nothing compared to heaven. We men in particular need to respect women and treat them with respect. The home is the foundation of any stable culture. When men cast women aside for pleasure, breaking their marriage vows, they are guilty before God. Guard your marriage. Guard your passions. Guard your home.

Commented [notes15]: ¹After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ²and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. Luke 8:1-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ¹⁴Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Luke 7:14-15 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Colossians 3:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ³³However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ¹³But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)