

Series: Sermon on the Mount

Lesson: #17

Title: Plucking Out the Eye, Cutting Off the Hand

Scripture: Matthew 5: 27-32

Date: 8-30-2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Princeton, NJ

Matthew 5: 27: Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

Just as with the law of murder, those who perverted the law of God, restricted adultery to *acts* between married persons, exclusively, so that the law had no respect to fornication, or unchaste thoughts or words, but that single act only.

Matthew 5: 28: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart....31: It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 32: 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.

As he did with the law of murder, the Lord Jesus Christ spiritualizes the law of adultery, that is, he declares that the law is spiritual. The law is written in the letter. We can be read and hear it according to the letter. When the apostle Paul was yet a Pharisee, he said that touching the outward obedience of the law, he was blameless. But all such is but a carnal understanding. Paul said that when the commandment came into his heart by the Spirit of God, sin became alive and all his righteousness became filthy to him.

Matthew 5: 29: 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. 30: 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.

The Lord commands us to strike at the root of every part of our fleshly nature which feeds those sinful desires within us. The problem is so radical, the offense so great, that our Lord uses radical language--plucking out the eye, cutting off the hand--to describe how serious our problem is.

THE PROBLEM

It is foolish for us to think this can be accomplished by threats of hell; our Lord is not doing that here. It is foolish for us to think that we can mortify the deeds of the flesh, or have done so, by mere self-denial of this or that thing. In the context, the Lord is specifically speaking against that mere outward conformity to the law which the Pharisees regarded as being a fulfillment of the law.

Some have literally plucked out their eyes and cut off their hands only to find that lust remained in their hearts. First, one eye, then the other eye, then the hand, then the other hand, yet still the lust of the flesh remains.

The problem is sin in us. In Romans chapter 7 the apostle Paul is declaring how good the law of God is. At the same time he is declaring how utterly sinful we are in the flesh with which we came from our mother's womb. As a regenerated man—a believer—the apostle Paul said,

Romans 7: 15: For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. 16: If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good.

The apostle Paul is not speaking of outward immorality, not a sinful course of life, Paul is speaking of internal lusts, the workings of corruptions in his heart, made known to him by the law. He is speaking of the same inward corruption that the Lord Jesus Christ declares in our text. Paul says therefore the law is good; it is me that am the sinner.

Romans 7: 22: For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24: O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Paul cries out for mercy to be delivered from this whole "body of death"--from this "body of sin"; this mass of corruption that lodges within us, this fleshly carnal nature which exerts itself in the members of our fleshly body--those very members which our Lord said we could sooner do without if they feed the sin our old nature.

HOW DOES THE BELIEVER PLUCK OUT THE OFFENDING EYE AND CUT OFF THE OFFENDING HAND?

Romans 7: 25: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The way we pluck out the offending eye is only by God's grace, through the Spirit of God as we are enabled to behold Christ Jesus our Lord with the eye of faith in the inner man. The way we cut off the hand of the flesh is by laying hold of Christ with the hand of faith. The just shall live by faith.

Matthew 6:22: The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

Romans 8: 13: For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

No threats of hell, no law, no mere outward acts will do what only we can do through the Spirit of God. Mortification of the flesh comes by beholding the faithfulness of Christ in honoring the righteousness of God and fulfilling the law on behalf of the believer.

Matthew 5: 30:...it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell.

The Hand Cut Off

When we are made to behold once again, more clearly, in the heart, that our Substitute so delighted to magnify the law of God, that he was willingly made sin for us, cut off out of the land of the living under the fierce wrath of God in our place, because it was profitable in honoring the righteousness of God that one member of the body should perish, and not the whole body should be cast into hell then are we made to walk after the Spirit (Mt 5: 17; 2 Cor 5: 21.)

Only when a sin-plagued sinner beholds the depths of his sin, the inner workings of lust in his heart does he cry out for mercy. The mercy-begging sinner is strengthened to walk after Christ through the gospel of Christ Jesus the Righteous Representative and Substitute who lived and died and rose again so that we might

be made the righteousness of God in him. It is impossible for us to both behold Christ with the eye of faith seated at God's right hand and at the same time yield to the offending eye, to lay hold of Christ with the hand of faith and yet yield to the offending hand.

Colossians 3: 1: If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2: Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3: For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4: When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 5: Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:...9:...put off the old man with his deeds; 10: And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

The Faithful Husband

By faith, we behold that our Hosea came into this land of whoredoms and took us as a bride for himself (Ho 1: 2, 3.) Yet, when we played the adulteress in our whoredoms our God proved that he hates putting away. All the days of our separation he provided all we needed until the day he was determined to reveal his redemptive grace in us (Ho 2: 5-14.) We were nothing but a whore, an adulteress, a fornicator sold under sin with none to purchase us from our mountain of debt. But he yet, loved us.

Ephesians 5: 25: Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The Faithful Husband yet came forth and paid the price of his own blood to purchase his bride to himself. He reveals his faithfulness in effectual irresistible grace in our hearts and we shall not play the harlot, we shall be for him and he shall be for us (Hos 3: 1-3.) This is not merely a form of godliness this is what grace does in the heart, effectually, by the power of God, by the power of God, by the power of God.

Ephesians 4: 22: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23: And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24: And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Romans 13:14: But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.

Each renewing day, each season of strengthening, as grace renews us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ again and again, it is only by the power of his grace that he makes us to cease making provision for the flesh. We struggle, we war against the old carnal nature and at times the old man seems as if he will prevail. But by God's grace alone he takes us by the hand and leads us to a fresh view of our Savior's great person, of his great work. As we rejoice in him we find it is impossible to walk in the Spirit and at the same time fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:16: *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

When our new man is renewed that is when we through the Spirit do mortify--cut off the evil eye and the evil hand. It is all of God, in Christ, all through the power of the Holy Spirit, all through the gospel which declares the wonderful works of Christ Jesus our King and Savior.