

These Forty Days

Matthew 5:27-30

1. Jesus shows His authority over Scripture.

- John 5:39; John 1:1-5

2. Jesus clarifies the intent of the law.

- Matthew 5:17; Romans 3:19-20; Ezekiel 36:26-27

3. Jesus redraws the "line" of sin.

- Mark 7:15

4. Jesus elevates women.

- Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18, 5:21-22; Leviticus 19:18

5. Jesus warns men and women.

6. Jesus describes purity!

- Ephesians 5:3; Psalm 25:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13; Galatians 5:22-26, Galatians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 5:3; 1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 4:9-10; Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:5; Colossians 3:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 John 2:10

- and it's all about love

- Matthew 22:37-40

love.learn.live.

westvalleychurch.com



These Forty Days, 3rd Sunday of Lent *Matthew 5:27-30*¹

Thinking about the recent power outages in Texas reminded me of another story, of how one sagging electrical line near Cleveland, Ohio, connected with a tree branch at 3:32 p.m. on August 14, 2003, beginning a chain of events which led to one of the largest blackouts in American history. According to the final report, the failure of this single transmission line caused a utility company in southern Ohio to overload and seal itself off from the power grid. To the north, this created a huge need for power, and Cleveland began sucking an unsustainable amount of electricity from Michigan and Ontario, knocking out more transmission lines and generating plants. When the need for more power reached New York, power plants there sealed themselves from the grid in order to protect their own systems. This, however, created a new problem when New York, ironically, had too much electricity and overloaded its own system. The result: one of history's largest shutdowns, leaving 55 million people without power in eight states and Ontario, Canada.

In very much the same way, what may seem like small actions and choices can end with devastating personal and societal consequences. Sin often starts with one small choice, but the end result is ruined lives, ruined families, ruined churches, ruined communities.

It is one particular type of sin that Jesus speaks to in the section of the Sermon on the Mount that we are looking at today.²

We are on the third Sunday in the season of Lent, going through the Lenten devotional, *These Forty Days* together. How many of you have already read today's devotional? So you know what this is about...I have to tell you I wasn't too thrilled to preach on this because it can be quite uncomfortable for some. But then, if Jesus felt it was necessary to include it in His sermon, and it's in God's Word, then I'd better not shy away from it just because it might make us uncomfortable. Do you agree? You want me to continue? Ok...

Let's start with the passage itself, from Matthew 5:27-30. Would you stand with me as I read it for us today? Thank you.

¹ Sources:

Robert S. Snow, Arseny Ermakov, "Matthew: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition," *New Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, Beacon Hill Press, 2019), 100-101.

William Barclay, "The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1," *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1975), 146-155.

D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 151.

Roger L. Hahn, *Matthew: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 91-92.

John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 5:23-30.

Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 30-31.

Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 108-110.

² Source: James Glanz and Andrew C. Revkin, "Experts Retrace a String of Mishaps Before Blackout," *The New York Times* (8-23-03)

You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, 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. (Matthew 5:27-30, niv)

God, help us understand and apply your word to our lives that we might be healthy and holy. Thank you – please be seated. In order for us to get the power of the message that’s contained in these four verses, we need to better understand what is going on in the passage as well as what is being said. Let me start by saying this: guys: yes, Jesus is addressing us men, and yes – we are going to be uncomfortable. But ladies: the principles apply to you as equally as they do to the guys. So regardless of your gender, you are going to come under the white hot heat of the Scriptural spotlight, and neither gender is off the hook in this. Okay? So ladies you can quit elbowing your husbands in the ribs, and allow me to walk us through this. Before we look at the application, I want you to see what Jesus is doing here...

1. Jesus shows His authority over Scripture.

Jesus is establishing his authority over Scripture. This is the second of six times in this section of Jesus’ sermon that he says, “You have heard it said...” and then he quotes a well-known section of the Old Testament Law, and then he says, “But *I* say...” So what he is doing is explaining what God *really* intended by the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Law and Prophets. And only someone who knows God’s mind, heart, and intentions could do that – only someone who is actually God could do that. So when Jesus says, “You have heard it said...but I say...” you’ve got to realize that he is establishing himself as an *even greater* authority than Scripture. When Jesus was speaking to the experts in the Old Testament Scriptures and the religious leaders, he wanted them to realize that even though they were experts in the Bible, they were missing the whole point of the Bible; they were missing the forest for the trees. He said to them:

“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!” (John 5:39, nlt)

The whole point of the Bible is Jesus! That’s why in the beginning of John’s gospel, he goes to great lengths to identify who Jesus really is. The very first five verses say:

“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.” (John 1:1-5, nlt)

In other words, Jesus is THE Word of God; he is the living, breathing, image of God and every Word God speaks finds its meaning and purpose in Jesus. Jesus the living Word is

more important than the written Word.

Have you noticed that some people are so religiously, fundamentally devoted to the literal, written Bible that they worship Scripture instead of the *source* of Scripture? They interpret Jesus by the written Word, instead of interpreting the written Word by Jesus. There are many passages that point out how amazed people were when they heard Jesus speaking and teaching, because of the incredible authority with which he spoke. That's because *Jesus is the author!* So as that one who has authority...

2. Jesus clarifies the intent of the law.

As we said, he is revealing the mind and heart of God regarding the commandments, so he is clarifying for them what the law was really about. This is why Jesus said a few verses back in his sermon:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17, niv)

Jesus didn't come to give a *different* Scripture; he is *the point* of all of Scripture; he came so that, by his death and resurrection and by the power of the Holy Spirit that God's forgiveness enables us to have, we can actually OBEY Scripture! So when Jesus says, “You have heard it said...but I say...” He is saying, I am the Word, and in me you can live out what my Word intended all along.

Yes, the Scripture shows that it is impossible for us to obey God's Law by our own strength. That's exactly how it is explained to us in Romans 3:

“Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.” (Romans 3:19-20, nlt)

But – the *intent* of the law is that it is obeyed by us; God's desire has always been that we would be able to obey his Word. And since he knew we couldn't do it on our own, God solved the problem for us by sending his Son Jesus to die in our place and then rise from the dead so that we could have a brand new life. In fact, God declared his intentions for us:

“And I will give you a new heart—I will give you new and right desires—and put a new spirit within you. I will take out your stony hearts of sin and give you new hearts of love. And I will put my Spirit within you so that you will obey my laws and do whatever I command.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27, tlb)

Do you understand this? If we understand that, then it adds even more weight to what the words in this passage say, because they are coming from God himself, and what they say is very important.

Remember that there are six times that Jesus says, “You have heard it said...but I say...” And in each of these times, Jesus is establishing his authority and is clarifying the intention of the Scripture. And in each case, including the one we are looking at today...

3. Jesus redraws the “line” of sin.

As if obeying the law wasn't impossible enough, Jesus defines sin and moves the line even further. Jesus is raising the bar on obedience and redrawing the line that becomes sin.

In the case of the law that Jesus is addressing here, as in the others, the problem was that people had determined where the line was. So if the law says, “Do not commit adultery,” than *that's* the line that I can't cross. And if that's the line, then that means I can do everything right up to the line, and not be guilty.

For instance, the religious leaders (who were all men), determined that adultery was the actual, physical definition of intercourse between a married person and someone who was not their spouse. So that meant that a person – typically the man – could do everything right up to that line, and still be innocent and not sin and not break the law. Those of you who remember politics in the 1990s will remember a prime example of this – when President Clinton was being investigated for an adulteress relationship with a White House intern, he emphatically said, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman!” Because he was saying “Here's the line, and I didn't cross it. I may have done stuff right up to that line, but I didn't cross it!”

(This is why it's uncomfortable for me to talk about this: because for those of you who have your children in here with you, now you have to explain to them what this is about! Sorry about that, but you told me to continue!)

So the law defined sin, but in people's minds it also gave them permission to do everything *up to* that sin. But Jesus redrew the line, and he moved it waaaaay back here. He said it wasn't just doing the *act* that was sin, but instead it was way back here at the *thought*. Jesus redrew the line, because he knew the issue wasn't the *action* – it was the *heart* that committed the action. That's why Jesus said:

“Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.” (Mark 7:15, niv)

Do you understand that? So Jesus established his authority over Scripture, he clarified the intent of the Law, and then he redrew the line of sin and moved it from the external action all the way back to the internal thoughts of the heart.

And another thing; having established all those things, in the midst of these verses...

4. Jesus elevates women.

Now, this is a good thing, but it's also a difficult thing. Let me explain: when Jesus said in this passage, “You have heard it said, ‘Don't commit adultery,’” he's referring to the Old Testament Scriptures of Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. That's the seventh of the ten commandments. But the tenth commandment says:

“You must not burn with desire for another man's wife, nor envy him for his home, land, servants, oxen, donkeys, nor anything else he owns.”
(Deuteronomy 5:21-22, tlb)

Remember I said that the scholars and experts in the law were men? Well, that's important

because they took the seventh commandment and lumped it in with the tenth commandment. These men decided that, since the other things in the tenth commandment were about not being jealous for someone else's *property*, then women must also be a man's property. So that meant that, for men, this rule that Jesus' quotes wasn't a function of purity, it was an issue of theft; if a man committed adultery, he was stealing another man's property; she's not really a person. And that allowed men to minimize the impact of sexual sin, and it opened the door for all kinds of other abuses against women.

So, while men interpreted the law to mean that women were property, Jesus was saying that the law that this was really about was the one in Leviticus 19:18 that says:

“Don't seek revenge or carry a grudge against any of your people. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am God.” (Leviticus 19:18, tmt)

By saying that a man could sin against a woman, Jesus elevated the status of women from *property* to *neighbor* – an *equal*.

But, don't be misled...

5. Jesus warns men and women.

By elevating women to the status of men, the warning that Jesus gives now applies to both men and women. And by drawing the line back to the thoughts, Jesus is warning *both genders* that the sin originates in the mind and heart, not in the eyes and hands. So anytime that a man or woman looks at another person lustfully – as if that person were an object for their own gratification, *that's* when they have sinned. The reason is because that man or woman you are lusting at is a person – a human that was made by God, in the image of God, and by looking at a person in that way, you are taking someone who is sacred to God and dehumanizing them, turning them into an object. So this isn't about just adultery for men; it's about *all* sexual sin for men *and* women, and giving them the value and dignity that God says they have.

I remember when I was in high school and I'd just become a Christian, and as a teenage boy, this was a particularly difficult command to obey. So I had asked a Christian friend of mine if he'd pray with me about this, and he said, “Mike, you should do the 5 second rule.” I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. He said that he figured that you could look at a girl for five seconds before you start lusting, so he would count to five while he was looking at a girl and then would stop; anything after five seconds was sin! I think he missed to point! I don't know how many seconds it takes, but you know as soon as you are thinking about it, or entertain the thought, that you are sinning.

And don't say that your “looking” is no big deal.

Did you know that male turkeys, often referred to as toms or gobblers, are created with a unique ability. When a tom gobbles, all hens within range answer the call and move toward him.

During the Spring mating season, toms call for potential mates all day long. There is an exception, however. If a tom already has a hen with him, most of the time he will not leave his lady to check out another, no matter how enticing the response. In most cases, a mature

tom will not leave the hen he can see to chase down a hen he cannot see. It's against his nature.

But there are exceptions.

Every now and then the tom will violate everything he knows to be true and leave his hen to answer a seductive hen call. When he does that, most of the time he never comes home, because what sounded like a willing mate was in reality an imposter – a human holding a gun.

I think you get the point – one small decision – one look could lead to something deadly for you – when it comes to this sin.

Folks, this sin is an epidemic in our country. In just one year, well over four and a half billion hours are spent watching porn on only *one* site. On that single website, humanity spent twice as much time viewing porn in a year as it has spent existing on planet Earth. The one site had over 90 billion video views and 44,000 visitors every minute of every day. It all adds up to over 500 thousand years' worth of porn consumed in the span of 12 months. Since 2015, human beings have spent over three million years watching porn. Porn seems to be America's favorite pastime, with the percentage of men and women viewers not that far apart. The porn industry is worth \$97 billion, which is about 100 times higher than the \$750 million it was worth 20 years ago. Today, porn grosses more in a year than Hollywood. It also brings in more money than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined. And this is just "the porn industry," the legal, W-2 filing porn stuff. If we were to quantify amateur porn and figure out what it's all "worth" in dollars, who knows what the number would be. And the United States is the world leader in watching that stuff.³ And that industry is very closely linked with human trafficking. Here are just a few broad stats:

By some estimates, 4.8 million people are trapped or forced into sexual exploitation globally.⁴ ⁵ In one survey, 63% of underage sex trafficking victims said they had been advertised or sold online.⁶

So don't think that just "looking" is no big deal. Looking, and imagining it, is sin and it has devastating results in our community and globally.

When Jesus talks about this sin, he's not making rules just to take away your "fun;" he knows how far reaching the damage of this sin is. Jesus isn't interested in getting you to obey a "law," in this passage...

6. Jesus describes purity.

What Jesus is describing is much more than obedience to the law; what Jesus is after is the purity of your heart and life. He knows that for you to live your best life – which is to be all that God created you to be – you've got to be holy – you've got to be done with sin and you

³ Source: Adapted from Matt Walsh, "We're A Nation Of Porn Addicts. Why Are We Surprised By The Perverts In Our Midst?" *Daily Wire* (11-30-17)

⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_243391.pdf

⁶ https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Survivor_Survey_r5.pdf

must be “pure in heart” as he said in the beatitudes. You can’t do that on your own; you need God’s Spirit. If this particular sin is an issue for you, you can’t deal with it by deciding you aren’t going to think about it anymore. All the self-improvement efforts, all the books you can read about it, all the self-discipline you can muster isn’t going to help you.

Let me put it this way: Take a second, pause, and take a deep breath and exhale. Clear your mind for a moment. Ok? Now, whatever you, *do not* think about elephants. Do your very best *not* to think about elephants. Okay, tell me: what are you thinking about? Elephants! You see – every time you think about *not* thinking about lust or sexual sin, you are in fact reinforcing the very behavior you are trying to stop. That is not what God hopes for and wants for you. The Bible says that we can take every thought captive and make it submit to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). God is clear:

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”
(Ephesians 5:3, niv)

God wants you to be pure, to be able to enjoy his presence in your life now and forever. That’s why his Word says:

“Who may climb the mountain of the Lord and enter where he lives? Who may stand before the Lord? Only those with pure hands and hearts, who do not practice dishonesty and lying. They will receive God’s own goodness as their blessing from him, planted in their lives by God himself, their Savior. These are the ones who are allowed to stand before the Lord and worship the God of Jacob.” (Psalm 25:3-5, tlb)

When it says you will receive God’s own goodness – that is *his* holiness, his nature, his character, his purity – in *you*! That’s why Jesus died for you and rose from the dead, so that you could be forgiven of the guilt and stain of sin, so that the Holy Spirit himself could then live in you, and make you holy:

“He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” (2 Timothy 1:9, niv)

Can you see that this is about being pure in heart? And Jesus knew how difficult this particular issue would be for us, which is why he identified this one in particular. And here’s the thing: this purity, this holiness, is about something far deeper than doing right things and not doing wrong things. This is holiness, plain and simple...

- and it’s all about love.

This is essential to recognize. This is why Jesus said that the greatest command is equally two things:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40, niv)

In other words, you will be obeying everything in the Bible when you love God supremely and love others equally.

The sin is about lust; holiness is about love. Lust is about seeking the pleasure that *I* want; love is about seeking what's best for *someone else*.

I remember when I was in high school I read a series of books by an author named Calvin Miller. The books were a series of three books, written in poetry, telling the allegorical story of Jesus and the Church. The books were called *The Singer*, *The Song*, and *The Finale*. *The Singer* was like the Gospel stories about Jesus, *The Song* was like the book of Acts – how the song continued in the life of the Church, and *The Finale* was like the book of Revelation, when Jesus returns and the Church and Christ are reunited forever. But in one of those books was this simple little line that is so profound: “*Love is substance; lust, illusion. Only in the surge of passion do they mingle in confusion.*” Love is the real thing; lust is a mirage made to trick you into thinking it's the real thing. When your passions drive your decisions, you can't tell the difference. But when the Spirit drives you, you are driven by love. Holiness is all about love demonstrated and working itself out in relationship – with God, with others and with ourselves:

“...and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:12–13, niv)

As his Spirit enables you to love, that love results in his holiness – his purity – in you. Remember that the very first fruit of the Spirit is: Love. (Galatians 5:22-26) Galatians 5:6 tells us that the only thing that counts is faith working through love. I have so many other Scriptures I'd love to share with you about this (Galatians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 John 5:3; 1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 4:9-10; Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:5; Colossians 3:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 John 2:10) so I've put them in the manuscript and in the outline. I'd strongly encourage you to spend some time in those.

Jesus is the authority – the author – of Scripture, and he is clarifying the intent of the law – he backs the line of sin all the way to your heart. He is all about valuing every person – male or female, so he warns us all: he longs for us to be pure and holy; to love God and to love others, just like Jesus loves.

Prayer

Holiness is so vital, that you should consider doing anything necessary to gain it. I hope you know that Jesus was NOT advocating self-mutilation by gouging your eyes or cutting off your hand; he was using hyperbole to tell you how important this is; that really, you should be willing to give up not only your eye or hand, but your whole life TO Christ, so that he can live through you.

Please stand for the Benediction from 1 Thessalonians 3:

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)