

Reading: 2 Samuel 11:1-11; Matthew 5:27-30

Theme: Be Careful Little Eyes What You See!

As a worldwide industry in 2016 it was worth \$97 billion (approx £77 billion); its websites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined *each month*. It has many publications. What is it? It is the pornography industry! It is big business. Sex sells! Sex seems to preoccupy people throughout the world today, as it has throughout history, but printing, film and especially the internet has addicted billions of people and many sexual matters are paraded, glamorized in society openly, let alone in secret. People's minds, desires and actions are so adversely affected by pornography. Perhaps not what you wanted or expected to hear this morning; it is not what I would choose to mention, but in dealing with Jesus' words in Matthew 5:27-30 it has to figure somewhere, so let's read those verses and move on to try to understand their implications for us.

For many Christians, especially older Christians, sex may be a taboo subject to talk about in private let alone in a service in a church and they feel it should be not be spoken of or preached in a church. I apologise if anyone is offended by this. Some may feel uncomfortable, children and young people may giggle and be embarrassed because parents or older friends are present and some parents may squirm also! Yet I cannot imagine preaching on these verses concerning our Lord's teaching on adultery without mentioning and quickly dealing with the subject of sex and the biblical perspective upon it.

We need to note that God, when He created Adam and Eve, He created them as male and female, with all the sexual desires, hormones and body anatomy in place! They were joined in marriage and this would have included, even before the Fall, the sexual union as they would become one flesh. Nowhere in the

Bible is the sexual union between a husband and a wife ever portrayed as wrong, evil or sinful. It is always expressed in the highest terms of respect, dignity and pleasure (Song of Songs). It is always presented as right and the marriage bed as undefiled, pure and to be delighted in by husband and wife. Yet we are far from that situation now and it seems something has gone wrong with society. That which is so right, pure and honourable has been dragged down, polluted, cheapened and dishonoured. It is seen as a mere biological act, a source of coarse humour and stories; a thing to be pushed and written about in print, paraded in films, DVDs and advertising. Young people of all age ranges are involved in watching pornography, sexting on their mobile phones and thinking that anything and everything is allowable, up for grabs and acceptable.

People have taken one of God's most precious and pleasurable gifts, and mutilated, perverted it so much. This is a consequence of Adam and Eve not remaining in their initial right relationship with God, but they disobeyed Him and in doing so something came in and warped every man, woman and child - it is sin. This is an old-fashioned word, but it has an up-to-date relevance for and effect on us all. It has outworked in us all in many ways, to varying degrees - including the whole area of our sexual desires and even confuses people's sexuality too. Sin has a mighty power, an elusive, subtle, attracting and addictive power. That is why we need to realise, teach and warn about sin and not just sins; we need to see the principal and power of sin as the disease causing the various symptoms - sins.

Sin is a very powerful force in creation, especially in mankind. Thankfully there is greater power and that is God. Only He can free us from sin's grip and ensnaring power; only His love, revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel, can deliver us

from the consequences of sin in our lives. In the light of what Jesus is saying here about adultery, recognise it is only one expression of sin's outworking. I want us to note 3 things from these verses:

1. Sin's Deluding Destructiveness. (v27-28)

The Pharisees took the 7th commandment "*You shall not commit adultery*" and left it at the actual act of adultery. They failed to consider words in the 10th Commandment "*You shall not covet your neighbour's wife*" and they saw this 7th Commandment simply in terms of actions and deeds. Jesus exposes this as delusion and led to chaos in people's lives. Sin is something within our lives, in the centre of our beings, feelings, emotions, desires in the heart and these sinful things can also lead to the wrong outward actions.

Each and every one of us has right God created, designed and given sexual desires. Sin can take these and use them in a wrong way in our lives. Fire is good in a fireplace, in a central heating system; but if it spills out onto the hearth, then the carpet and spreads out of control, it is no longer a good thing, but needs to be extinguished and contained. The power of sin is that it takes what is right and good in its correct and proper place and expression and it spreads so it quickly as it takes hold on our inflammable natures. Scholars agree that the purpose of the 7th Commandment excludes any sexual act outside the marriage relationship between a man and a woman.

While we may not be able to commit the act of adultery or any sexually immoral act, yet our desires can be there and inflamed and we would if we could. Jesus says that even these misplaced desires are wrong. God sees and knows when we, all of us are included - not just a man, but male or female, young or old -

deliberately gaze, look at another person with lust – in person, pictures, on film or in our minds. It is not the seeing of an attractive person, but the wrong looking after them in lust, to fantasise, to think wrong thoughts and inflame wrong desires. Sin deludes us into thinking it is fine, but we are to resist even the temptation and aim keep out, get such out of our minds and hearts as soon as possible, for we can enter into heart adultery so easily and, if we are honest, even so willingly and impulsively.

In John Bunyan's book "The Holy War", the city of Mansoul is besieged, attacked by Diabolus and one gate, one entry into the city is frequently attacked and entered by enemy troops - the Eye Gate. Our eyes are so open to infiltration and Jesus speaks of looking here. David saw Bathsheba and instead of turning away, it seems he looked again (*so AV "from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon,"*) It is a fact that men are more highly visually stimulated than women. This is something that men, younger and older men need to bear in mind and need to be like Job who made a covenant with his eyes not to look lustfully at a girl (Job 31:1). This needs to be practically worked out and as men we can discuss this together. We need to be so careful to guard what enters our minds via our eyes. Having dealt with many young people through the years we had to point out that some of the clothing the girls wore was inappropriate - even if it was fashionable, as it could lead young men, even older men around them into sinful thoughts. Ladies be wiser in what you wear than Bathsheba was where she had her bath!

Sin will twist God given desires and use them to destroy us - morally and emotionally as well as causing havoc in marriages and relationships. David's home life bore the consequences of his lust and adultery for years afterwards. Adultery, sexual

immorality is not only the actual deed, but we break the 7th commandment when our desires, lusts, thoughts go to sexually immoral deeds with another person. These things are wrong for both the unmarried and married about those not their spouse. We are to resist and deal with such wrong desires. It is a solemn that God knows and notes our thoughts and desires. Jesus speaks of dealing with such desires and we see:

2. The Radical Dealing with Sin. (v29-30a)

Don't forget here we are dealing with adultery, sexual immorality, but recognise our thought life can be on coveting, stealing, murder, plotting to lie, failing to honour parents, or wrong thoughts towards God, His day and name. As we look at the radical dealing with this particular manifestation of sin, we need to realise it applies to any wrong thoughts whatsoever. They all need to be dealt with in a radical way. In v29-30a Jesus graphically expresses the radical way we should deal with sin and what entices us to sin, to do or think wrong things.

Here Jesus is not saying we must literally pluck out our right eye or literally cut off our right hand. There have been misguided fanatics who have mutilated themselves in this way, but they can still sin with their left eye and hand and even if both eyes of gone, they still have lustful thoughts in their minds and hearts. The right eye and right hand have long been regarded as the most precious - as right handedness has dominated. Jesus is saying that even if it is the most precious thing to us and that causes us to sin; then we are to deal with it, get rid of it. Because it is so precious Jesus knows it will be hard and difficult, but it must be dealt with in a radical way. Sin, whatever sin, must be got rid of and its causes, including that which makes it easier to sin, must be removed also. If a thing is going to trap us and cause us to stumble, then we are to get rid of it practically. There can be

things that may appear harmless and maybe harmless to another person, but they can adversely affect us and good things are no longer good when they lead us into wrong!

We can be in danger of hanging onto precious, secret sins and thoughts. They may have been so long part of us and we cannot imagine life without them, but if they are a persistent source of sinning, offending against God, then we need to get rid of them even if our lives seem maimed. We are to realise our radical dealing with sin will involve practical actions and not merely a secret resolve. We know those things that will lead us into sin, into immoral lustful thoughts - then avoid such things, flee them. The Bible says “*flee youthful lusts*” and that is a warning for us all and not merely for young people. Realise David was in his 50’s when he committed adultery!

A children’s hymn goes “*O be careful little eyes what you see, O be careful little eyes what you see, There's a Father up above And He's looking down in love. So, be careful little eyes what you see.*” We are to be ever so careful what we read, listen to, watch and hear so that we are not adding fuel to wrong immoral thoughts and desires. To put a fire out we need to starve it of fuel and oxygen and we are not to feed our sexual desires when we are not in a marriage relationship and not wrongly within it. Many people think that Christianity is anti-sex and sexual sins are the worst. Yet that is not the case. Sin, whatever sin, however sin manifests itself, is something that God hates. Sexual sins - adultery etc. are foolish sins as they can affect us and our loved ones in such powerful devastating ways. We are to realise the need for this radical dealing with sin and so finally note:

3. The Importance of the Soul. (v30b)

Why does the Lord Jesus call us to deal with sin of thought and heart in such a radical way? It is because we are more than just bodies, more than just intelligent animals who give in to their desires of any kind, especially sexual desires. We have immortal souls and their eternal destiny far outweighs in importance any temporary, passing pleasure we may have or desire. Our souls have capabilities to enjoy pleasures we cannot even imagine now and which will utterly eclipse the greatest moment of pleasure on earth, whether it is a right or wrong pleasure, any pleasures that we can ever know - including sexual pleasure.

Yet people live for pleasure, especially sex. Many are plotting, planning and scheming for this affair or relationship. As important, vital as these things appear, they are just for a short time. The eternal well being of our soul is vastly more important and if we see sin as traps to snare our souls and then losing them for eternity, we will not play about with sin for a moment. If the wages of sin were paid instantly, sin would not be so attractive! We would consider an animal foolish if it played about with a snare or a ginn trap. We are to consider sin like that - here the focus is on sexual sin, and if we are snared, then we are to take radical steps to get free. There are stories of animals chewing off their legs to get free from traps to save their lives.

What importance do we put on our souls? Whatever comes between us and God must be dealt with radically - whether thoughts or deeds. We must let nothing come between us and our soul's eternal safety. This would include not only sin and immorality, but our morality, pride, niceness, goodness and even religiousness. We are to recognise we cannot control our thoughts and desires. We are not strong enough to take on sin in all its awful beauties, subtleties, deceitfulness and power. Sin has us trapped, snared, chained and its captive. We need someone to

rescue us, to be our Rescuer, Saviour. God has provided Him - the Lord Jesus Christ, who took our sin, became sin for us on Calvary, who took our punishment in our place, that when we believe on Him, He grants us freedom from sin's power, guilt and dominion.

When we trust the Lord Jesus it does not mean we will be perfect, but it means we will have the power of God the Holy Spirit to be able to more resist and battle against sin. There may be someone here feeling trapped, snared, entangled in sin, maybe sexual immorality in deed or thought and may be a Christian or not yet a Christian. We are to realise that God can forgive us. There has to be confession of such sin, to have a desire to leave such sin alone and so we ask Him for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 declares *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* If we are not yet a Christian then it is confessing our sin and asking God, in Jesus, to forgive us and clean us up and out and help us live the new life He gives in salvation.

Every sin, all sin can be forgiven if we go to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes there may still be consequences in our lives as we are affected by, or have affected others. Yet with God we will be forgiven and our soul's destiny will be heaven. Whatever sinful thoughts, practices or habits afflict us, I pray that we would all know the free and complete forgiveness from God and we would try to live a life to please Him, both externally in our public lives and also in our inward thoughts and desires.