

Deeper Discoveries

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 6: Matthew 5:27–30



Literary Design

As Jesus moves on to the second example, note the parallelism in his interpretation of this law with the first. Essentially, anger is to murder as lust is to adultery. The self-deceiving evil that lies within one's heart is the root cause of wicked and hurtful actions. And this evil, unless one repents, leads one to hell/Gehenna. The Greek words translated as "anyone who looks" in v. 28, in this context, describe a person going beyond a passing glance to one looking continuously—not only viewing or imagining a naked body but, in view of 'to lust after' in the next clause, dwelling on that long look in lust and actually desiring to have sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. The sin is letting the look incite ungodly passion. [1]

Hyperbole

Jesus frequently employed hyperbole—deliberate overstatement for rhetorical effect—as a teaching tool. [2] This device appears throughout the Sermon on the Mount and beyond. An important Bible reading guideline: A hyperbolic statement is never literally true, but through its exaggeration it conveys truth even more vividly than a literal statement would. [4]

Jesus instructed that those struggling with lust should tear out their eyes, [2] yet his followers were not known as "The Assembly of the One-Eyed Disciples," [3] revealing the exaggerated nature of his language. The literal point was that believers must radically embrace marital faithfulness as a sacred commitment before God. [2] In other examples of hyperbole, Jesus spoke of relinquishing both outer and inner garments, which would leave a person naked, and giving to everyone who asks, which would quickly leave someone destitute. [2] He also spoke of a camel going through the eye of a needle, a mustard plant becoming a huge tree in which birds build nests, and hating the members of one's own family. His statement that we must hate our father and mother means, once the exaggeration is scaled back, that we must value God above even our earthly family. [4]

Hyperbole expresses strong feeling, states extreme conviction, and gets people to notice—purposes all present in Jesus' hyperbolic statements. [4] Despite hyperbole, *Jesus demands more than he states*, not less, [2] making recognition of the device essential to proper obedience rather than an excuse for disobedience.

Metaphorical language and imagery

Within his hyperbolic teaching, Jesus invokes Gehenna as the ultimate consequence of refusing to deal with sinful desires. Gehenna—the Valley of Hinnom—was a boundary marker between Judah and Benjamin. It was associated with God's divine wrath and judgment because Kings Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their children to Molech there (Jer 7:31–32; 32:35). Jesus uses this image to show how serious sin is and how it stands between people and God. We desperately need God's power to turn from sin and follow him. For those who refuse to repent, the power of sinful desires keeps them from a relationship with God, ultimately leading to judgment and wrath. [5]

The hyperbolic language about cutting off parts of the body, combined with the final judgment image of Gehenna, gives Jesus' warning great force. His extreme language about physical harm points to the real spiritual danger of unrepentant lust.

- [1] Thomas Tehan and David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of the Sermon on the Mount*, Second Edition (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 67. Edited.
- [2] Craig S. Keener, "The Sermon's Ethical Teachings: Living from the inside Out," *Bible Study Magazine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press; Faithlife, 2020), 12:2:38. Edited. Italics mine.
- [3] Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 237. Edited.
- [4] Leland Ryken, *Jesus the Hero: A Guided Literary Study of the Gospels*, Reading the Bible as Literature (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 115–116. Edited.
- [5] John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016). Edited.

Old Testament Connections and Themes

Jesus applies the principle of the abiding authority of the OT law and intensifies it again. He quotes the seventh commandment from Exod 20:14 and Deut 5:18, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'" Again, in his explanation, Jesus states that one cannot fulfill this command by simply avoiding sexual relations with one's neighbor's wife. In parallel with Prov 6:25–26, Jesus confronts his hearers with the fact that adultery is committed in the desires of one's heart before it is committed in practice. By graphically posing the possibility that the eye may be a cause for stumbling, Jesus applies the "eye for eye" judgment (Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21). Yet it is not the eye that puts one at such risk. Jesus points beyond the eye to the heart, where adulterous desire (see Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21) and the true danger of eternal judgment reside—leading to hell itself. [1]

The Old Testament often uses the vivid picture of adultery to describe Israel's unfaithfulness to God through idolatry. See Jer 3:6–10, 2:20–25, 3:1–3, 3:20; Hos 1:2, 2:2–13, 4:12–15; Ezek 16:15–43, 23. Jesus' teaching about adultery fits within this same biblical framework. The Old Testament law was concerned with the heart. It recognized that adultery begins within a person's heart, and that lust violates the purpose of the law just as surely as the physical act of adultery. [2]

Both teachings point to the same basic truth: faithfulness begins in the heart and is shown by our loyalty, not by following outward rules. The Old Testament's picture of idolatry as adultery and Jesus' teaching that lust *is* adultery both show that sin begins with what we desire and where our loyalty lies. Both call for exclusive devotion—to God as members of his covenant people and to our spouse within the marriage covenant.

- [1] Michael Daling, "Matthew," in *Connecting Scripture New Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, Christian Standard Bible (Brentwood, TN: Holman Bible, 2025), 12. Edited
- [2] Michael Fink, "Adultery," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 30–31. Edited.

Commentary (Michael Green)

Jesus turns to the seventh commandment, against adultery (5:27–30). Here again it is not merely the act that is condemned, but the attitude from which it comes. To deliberately foster lust through erotic books, plays, films, magazines, and websites is to fly in the face of this commandment. For who knows when the bridle of decency will snap under the strain, and the racehorse of our passions break loose? "Man looks upon the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." Some Christians have taken verses 29–30 literally. Origen, for example, castrated himself because of the imperious urge of lust. [note: he should have had some training on hyperbole!] But that is not what Jesus means. He is telling us that we must deal with sin as drastically and radically as necessary, cutting off avenues we know are dangerous to cultivating the purity of heart Jesus calls "blessed" (5:8). [1]

- [1] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 94–95. Edited.