

LUST REQUIRES A RADICAL RESPONSE

Matthew 5:29 (NKJV)

29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Immediately on the heels of saying “**whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**”, Jesus then immediately makes this exceedingly strong statement about the EYE. He says, “**If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you**”. This is clearly a RADICAL statement requiring RADICAL action. You can’t be passive when it comes to the lust of the eyes.

It requires drastic action! This is the only way one can have victory over it. Essentially, all commentators believe that Jesus was here speaking in hyperbole or exaggerated terms to make a point. Sometimes the Bible does use this kind of language to make a point. For example in **Proverbs 23:2** it says, “**And put a knife to your throat If you are a man given to appetite.**” This is not saying he should commit suicide, but rather figuratively saying he should take drastic measures to ensure he cuts back on how much he eats.

If lust is truly a HEART problem, which Jesus has just indicated it is, then the answer is not found in a physical solution such as gouging out the eye. And even if you do gouge out the right eye, you still have the other eye to contend with. And as someone said then you are just left with being a “left-eyed luster”. And if you gouge out both eyes, you still have the thoughts in the heart. And right there is the fundamental PROBLEM! (cf. Mt. 15:19)

Jesus is using figurative language to emphasize that a problem with lust must be dealt with in a decisive and drastic manner.

In terms of application for believers what Jesus is saying here is very close to the emphasis Paul made in Colossians 3:5.

Colossians 3:5 (NKJV)

5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

The verb translated “**put to death**” is strong. It means to kill decisively or resolutely (cf. Rom. 4:19, Heb. 11:12). It means to “**slay utterly**”. There is to be no negotiation or dilly dallying here. This means to kill outright. Go for the jugular! Severe measures are required.

Paul speaks of your members which are on the earth in a metaphorical way. Really, he is speaking of the sins committed in conjunction with the various members of the physical body. We are to stop the body dead in its tracks when it comes to these particular sins. In effect we are to kill sin at the root in terms of our practice (cf. Rom. 6:11, 8:13). These sins are not to have any place in our members. This is comparable to what Christ said here in Matt. 5:29-30 when He said to “pluck out” and “cut off”.

The essential idea is to radically deal with sin that wants to work its way into our life through our body. By our will, with God’s help, we must respond resolutely to the lusts of the flesh that would seek to use our physical body for illicit purposes.

I heard of a dog trainer who teaches dogs to be absolutely obedient to their master. His method goes like this. When he begins training a dog, he will command it not to eat a piece of meat and then throw it down in front of the dog and of course the dog immediately gobbles it up. He will then beat the dog (not cruelly or abusively, but sufficient for training). As he repeats the process the dog learns to associate pain with eating the meat contrary to the orders of the master and so the dog will come to realize that it cannot LOOK at the meat or it will capitulate with resulting pain. The dog learns that the secret of obedience is to NOT LOOK!

What a great illustration! We cannot LOOK or we will fail! When it comes to sexual temptation the Bible commands us to FLEE (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18). DON'T LOOK! If one flirts with the enticement of LOOKING, they will most likely suffer the painful consequences of failure. Joseph RAN from sexual temptation and thus kept his purity (cf. Gen. 39:12). Samson did not run and therefore stumbled (cf. Judges 14:1). The allurements of sexual sin is so powerful that we must FLEE from it if we are to be victorious. There can be no negotiation. The flesh craves to LOOK, but just like a well-trained dog we must realize we cannot even LOOK or we will fall! The warning of Jesus is severe to make this point! This certainly applies in terms of a strong application to the life of a believer (cf. Job 31:1).

However, in light of what Christ goes on to say, ***“for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”*** I think He may be saying something even more basic than merely giving a principle of sanctification.

He is talking about HELL (Gehenna) which ultimately has in view the lake of fire which is where the lost will suffer for all eternity.

“Since a lustful heart would ultimately lead to adultery, one’s heart must be changed. Only by such a change of heart can one escape hell (“Gehenna”; cf. v. 22).” – ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

“This holy restraint is true Christian asceticism. Of course what really has to happen is a change of one’s heart or his inner self, a regeneration or new birth, if he would escape being ‘thrown into hell’ (NASB).” – ***Howard Vos***

This is what I think Jesus is ultimately saying here. Unless one comes to true repentance, which is really a RADICAL response to sin that alters the course of one’s life, then they are headed for hell fire.

Remember the New Covenant that Christ came to make possible is all about being changed from the inside out.

Jeremiah 31:33 (NKJV)

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

In a figurative way Christ is emphasizing the necessity of a radical repentance that fundamentally alters a person. This type of thing happens in conversion. It is the experience of every true believer. Paul talks about “the circumcision made without hands” which is radical spiritual surgery brought about in the heart by God (Col. 2:11).

Galatians 5:24 (NKJV)

24 And those who are Christ’s **have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This relates to the response of repentance in saving faith that results in the execution of the flesh. There must be a death to the flesh. This death happens in conjunction with repentance. This is why John the Baptist told the wicked religious leaders to go and ***“bear fruits worthy of repentance”*** (cf. Mt. 3:8). The idea is that genuine repentance will bring forth the fruit of a changed life. In the case of the NT believer, it is the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance marks a line that we cross over, which denotes a radical break from sin and the flesh, in terms of its ruling power. I think this is principally what Jesus has in view here in Matt. 5:29-30.

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (NKJV)

9 Do you not know that the **unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom** of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, **10** nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And **such were some of you**. But you were **washed**, but you were **sanctified**, but you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 21:8 (NKJV)

8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, **sexually immoral**, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Revelation 22:14–15 (ESV)

14 Blessed are those who **wash their robes**, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the **sexually immoral** and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Remember that Christ said in verse 20 that unless your righteousness exceeds the external righteous standard of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Unless we know a fundamental change of heart (called repentance) that affects the whole of our life, we will not see the kingdom. This is really RADICAL stuff, which so much of Christendom today no longer takes very seriously.

So much of it is about various forms of “***Easy Believism***” that completely leaves repentance out of the equation. That is a grave mistake that has hellish implications, as taught by Christ.