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Congregation:	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) Hamilton, Ontario canadianreformedseminary.ca	Ps 24:1,2 Hy 8:1 [after Nicene Creed] Reading – Matthew 5:27-32
Preached At:	Free Reformed Church of Mt. Nasura Mt. Nasura, Western Australia frca.org.au/mountnasura/	Ps 130:1,2,3,4 Sermon – Lord's Day 41
Title:	Christ Intensifies the Seventh Commandment	Ps 101:1,2,3
Text:	LD 41 (View)	Ps 1:1,2,3
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Brothers and sisters, you shall not commit adultery. That's the seventh commandment of God's law. And because it's *God's* law, we have to make sure we know what He's saying. What is adultery? Children might think that adultery sounds like something that *adults* do, or we think it's about really bad things like having an affair with your co-worker. So maybe this one is not relatable.

But God's command speaks to each and every one of us, whether young or old or single or married. And unfortunately, it's no problem to quickly make a long list of ways in which the seventh commandment is being broken.

There's the pornography that is easily accessible on the phone in our back pocket. There is the eager promotion of a homosexual lifestyle. And there is the flood of sexual content on TV and in movies and songs. There is promiscuity, even among people who claim to know Christ. We're confronted with many dangers, many perversions, many temptations.

Yet behind all the adultery, we still need to see the original goodness of God's gift. All the filth should not be allowed to muddy our vision of sexuality as a beautiful creation of the LORD. From his hand, it's a gift to be treasured and defended. It is a broken world, and we are sinful people. Yet let's look at the whole picture:

the dark side, but also the sanctified side of sexuality. Christ in his Sermon on the Mount is ready to give us good instruction in this regard. I preach God's Word regarding the seventh commandment, summarized in Lord's Day 41,

Christ teaches us about the holiness of sexuality:

- 1. the serious threats to this gift**
- 2. the drastic defense of this gift**
- 3. the beautiful setting for this gift**

1) the serious threats to this gift: Let's think for a moment what Christ is doing in his Sermon. He is busy "filling out the law." He is saying that God's commands reach a lot farther than we first think. They address not just outward things—like the behaviours that we can see—but also the inner, even the thoughts and intentions of our heart.

This is certainly true for Commandment #7. Christ begins once more with the familiar, with the law everyone knew: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery'" (Matt 5:27). God looked severely upon any sexual relations that fell outside the safe boundaries of his law. In the Old Testament, such offenses were even punished by death.

And in this connection, Jesus's audience might have been tempted to feel good about themselves, like we might be tempted. We could ask ourselves a bit smugly: Have we really broken this commandment like we see being done in this world, and made a perversion out of sexuality like some people have? Have we flown the Rainbow flag, visited a prostitute, or dabbled in pedophilia? Have we made a mockery of marriage? I don't think so.

Yet before we warmly congratulate ourselves for our holiness, Christ confronts us with the penetrating truth of God's law: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (v 28). It's a hard dose of reality.

Notice that this is all Christ says specifically about the seventh commandment. Jesus explains several of the other commandments at some length, but when it comes to this one, his words are few. This is all He needs to say. These few and well-chosen words get to the heart of the matter: When it comes to anything relating to sexuality, what do we do with our eyes? What do we think about in our mind?

And you can tell that Christ understands how we work. In the first place, He knows that life is full of evil glances. He knows that it's so easy to look at someone in the wrong way. To get in a good stare, and to sneak a peek. We are surrounded by the opportunities. In our media-saturated world, images are always passing in front of us, popping up in our vision. And what do our eyes do?

We can't close our eyes all the time. We can't avoid seeing or interacting with attractive people. Christ knows this. But it's all in how we look: Do we look lustfully? Christ uses a Greek word that means a look "full of sexual desire." It's a willful, deliberate stare at someone—a look that arouses desire, a look that feeds our lust.

We know what He means. This is taking a second look at the woman jogging along the street or walking down the beach. This is letting your eyes fall on that billboard on the way to work. This is returning often to the Internet sites where every last one of those images and videos is meant to excite sexual desire. We're not looking to admire, to study human anatomy, but we're looking to lust! "Whoever looks with lust has already committed adultery." Jesus gets right to the heart of our sin and reveals our guilt.

This is not a new temptation. It's not unique to our modern age with its smartphone technology and its godlessness. Even Job, the saint who probably lived way back in the time of the patriarchs, faced this struggle. He once said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman." (31:1).

Already thousands of years ago, the software of the human heart was corrupted. Already then, Job knew the power of a glance. He knew how easy it is to fill yourself with sinful longings. So he consciously steered his eyes from danger. He says he made a covenant, an agreement with his eyes, as it were. He promised them, "I will not point you in the wrong direction. I will not defile you with wrong desires." Those are words for us to echo and affirm.

A bit later in his Sermon, Christ will say more about our eyes: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Matt 6:22-23).

"The lamp of the body is the eye." We have a similar expression: The eyes are a window to the soul. It means that the things we regularly place before our eyes will come streaming directly into our hearts. You become what you behold. This is true for anything that we idolize, whether we gaze intently at our money, or stare at our fine features in the mirror, or obsess over our reputation. What you look at constantly begins to shape you.

So also our glances at other people, the stolen looks, the eyes that linger in places where they shouldn't—this is potent fuel for sinful hearts, raw material for impure fantasies. If the eye is bad, the body will be filled with darkness.

This command speaks to all of God's people in the struggle against sexual temptation. The struggle is there, and it is real! Satan has seized this good gift of God, and has used it with a terrible and corrupting power.

For good reason Christ talks about *a man* looking at a woman lustfully. This has been rightly called "every man's battle." It's the struggle to guard our eyes and protect our purity. If you're a Christian man, you need give attention to fighting this war which rages all around us—and deep within us—every single day. Protect your eyes, and protect your heart.

What about Christian women and girls? Consider again the society that we live in. For example, by its advertisements, movies, and pop songs, the world regularly tries to sell us its image of what a woman ought to be. The ideal woman is attractive and bold. She is empowered, master of her own body. She can dress how she pleases, act how she pleases, and she answers to no man—and not to God either.

Christian women need to be aware of what influences are present in their lives. What role models and ideas shape how they talk, and how they dress and behave and how they view themselves? In these things, have we quietly or unknowingly adopted some of the world's standards? Or are we fiercely defending God's gift?

2) the drastic defense of this gift: I hope that anyone would acknowledge their struggle to keep this commandment. And it's very hard when we're always being told to experience everything, to deny ourselves nothing. We're told that if no one finds out, why not? If two grown-ups agree, why not? So the struggle is one thing, but what will we do next? Are we willing to fight hard for holiness, and undertake a drastic defense of this gift?

After speaking about the serious threats to this gift, Christ gives his audience a plan of attack. It's a way to start overcoming this powerful temptation. Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you" (v 29). Again He says, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you" (v 30). This is how seriously we need to take it. Anything that is a predictable cause of sin in our life, or anything that we know to be a seduction to sin, should be removed, quickly and completely. Cut it off, pluck it out!

Does Christ mean this literally? That we actually dismember ourselves? Sadly, in the past some misguided Christians have this very thing. After committing adultery, their guilt was so severe that they mutilated their bodies.

But a literal application misses the point. For if you gouged out one eye, or cut off a hand, the remaining one could still lead you into sin! It doesn't take much. An eyeless and armless man or woman can still be taken captive by lust.

Christ knows that sin doesn't originate in the eye, that evil isn't created by the hand. These are only the physical instruments which our hearts and minds control. It is we who can make choices and set boundaries that will help to keep our body under control. Turn your eyes. Restrain your hands. And most importantly, train your heart!

If there is a sin that is captivating you, starting to dominate you, then you must do everything you can to break free. Be drastic about it. Don't make peace with it, and accept it as part of the scenery of your life. But put it away. For example, perhaps there is a friendship which is leading you into sin—a friend that often enables and encourages a godless walk—it's time to end that friendship. Or if there's an activity starting to ruin you, consume your thoughts and flatten any zeal you once had for God, take steps to remove it from your life. Take away the opportunity. Sever the things that support it. Amputate!

Maybe you can see that Jesus's words apply far more than simply to sexual temptation. This should always be our approach to sin. Don't show it any hospitality. Don't let yourself be enslaved by anything, whether alcohol or video gaming or pornography or people's approval or anything else. Put to death *whatever* belongs to your sinful nature.

Jesus's lesson applies broadly, to all temptation. It's always good counsel to chop and to prune the wickedness from our hearts and habits. But we should underline how this comes right after Christ's words on lustful thoughts. He compels us to ask the specific question: How shall we free ourselves from these impure desires? How do we keep ourselves away from sexual temptation? And He advises a drastic defense.

The Catechism takes the same approach. When it asks whether God forbids only things like affairs or premarital sex, the Catechism answers emphatically: "[God] forbids all unchaste acts, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever may entice us to unchastity" (Q&A 109).

Whatever may entice us to unchastity... Those are difficult words, for thoughts can come into our mind without us inviting them. Images you looked at once can be replayed in your mind a hundred times. A song, a show, a story, a video clip on YouTube—in a moment they can stir up wrong desires. So flee from whatever entices. Don't linger over it. Don't get close to the fire, or you'll be burned. Don't experiment and sample and explore, because God forbids whatever may entice you to unchastity.

In the early church, people tried to free themselves from all lustful thoughts. One of these so-called "hermits" was St. Anthony. For thirty-five years he lived a lonely and difficult life: he fasted, he did without sleep, he deprived himself of every comfort. He lived in the desert, far from the bright lights of a godless society. Yet Anthony wrote that for all those years, he still had a non-stop battle with the devil's temptation. Constantly he was troubled by thoughts of wealth and worldly cares. Constantly he was troubled by the desire for glory and forbidden pleasure.

Christ's strategy is better. He says, "You're in this world, and I won't take you out of it just yet. So while you're here, you need to take real action against your sin. And be as radical as you need to be." Make a severance. Draw a line. Cancel your subscription. Take a zero tolerance approach.

This means it's not enough to have good intentions. You can't merely hope to avoid the sexual temptation, vaguely hoping to do better next time you're in that situation. What if you go to the same kind of party next weekend, and you're tempted again? What if you're soon alone and you're lonely, and you crave that pleasure again? *Before* that moment, we need to do something about it!

With our God there is almighty strength and a sure hope. And the sure way to access his ready help is through walking with God: being in his Word, being steadfast in prayer, joining with his people. Fix your eyes on Christ, and fill your eyes with Christ. Without having a close relationship with the Lord, you won't win this fight. So draw near to God, and He'll draw near to you.

Let us remember too, that sin loves darkness, being hidden and concealed—that's where it grows best. So we ought to shine light onto this sin by confessing it. Confess it to God, honestly and specifically, together with prayer for strength to repent. We have God's promise in Christ that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us.

And how good it is that we don't stand alone! If there's a struggle we're having, we can get help from others. We can seek the encouragement and guidance of brothers and sisters. There's no shame in asking

for help, no shame in making use of their wisdom. As children of God, we face similar struggles, and we all need to learn very similar lessons.

Let's pause to reflect whether we need to take this so seriously. Isn't all this a bit drastic? Do we really need to be obsessive about avoiding temptation? Listen to the rest of Jesus' words. After telling us to take severe action against sin, He reminds us (two times!) of just what's at stake: "It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (vv 29, 30).

He means that if we don't make a surgical separation now, if we don't take drastic measures against sin today, we might miss out on salvation itself. For sin has power—deadly power. Sin destroys and ruins. Those who do not repent will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, this is true for all sin. But let's underline how sexual sin can be so lethal.

The book of Proverbs describes the power of an adulterous woman—and it's also true for an adulterous man, or whomever or whatever leads us into this kind of temptation: "For she has cast down many wounded and all who were slain by her were strong men. Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death" (7:26-27). This is where sin goes. It can snare us, enslave us. If we don't repent from it, it leads us into the fires of hell.

Scary, but a necessary warning! It is far better to stand aside from pleasure today, than to be cut out of eternal blessedness with God. The marriage feast of the Lamb is worth far more than a few good times before your death. This gift is too important to stand undefended, too precious to let it be corrupted.

3) the beautiful setting for this gift: When we listen to God's law, sometimes all that we hear are the "Thou shalt nots." Yet God has a very positive calling for us, his redeemed people. So also the seventh commandment, where God not only forbids unchaste thoughts and words and deeds, He also says what a blessing the gift of sexuality really is.

We know this, for God gave sexuality to be used in the beautiful setting of marriage. The Catechism even calls it "*holy* marriage" (Q&A 108), for marriage belongs to him. God created it, He set its boundaries, and He gave its noble purpose.

It's true that marriage has always been under attack. In the following verses (Matt 5:31-32), Jesus speaks about the weakening of marriage through divorce. Already in Christ's time, divorce was just a normal transaction, where husbands and wives went their separate ways for just about any reason.

But like He so often does, Christ turns the tables on accepted practices. It shouldn't be this way! And why? Holy marriage is far too important to discard or to neglect. From the beginning, it was God's will that there be a permanent commitment between man and woman. It is a lifelong covenant, a communion of love and faithfulness. In that marriage bond, a man and woman can enjoy a profound unity in body and soul. They're allowed to help each other not just in the things that belong to this life, but in the things of the next life too.

Only sinners get married, so sometimes marriage can be very difficult. It can be one long exercise in self-denial and sacrifice. For as long as we live, our inborn selfishness complicates every one of our relationships. We can be harsh and unforgiving and unkind, even to the one to whom we promised our lifelong devotion. “Those who marry will face trouble in this state.” Marriage can be hard, but as God’s gift, it is worth taking every effort to preserve and protect. It’s worth every effort to strengthen and restore!

Holy marriage is one more blessed confirmation that this broken world isn’t the domain of the devil, as if he’s free to corrupt what he wants, and ruin what he pleases. Holy marriage reminds us that this is still our Father’s world. No matter what Satan tries to wreck, God still makes it possible for us to do his holy will, and to honour him with our bodies and spirits.

We can’t really understand it, how Christ would unite himself so closely to a people who are so thoroughly and constantly defiled by sin. It’s amazing that God is willing to save us from ourselves, to break our chains and set us free and give us life. This is God’s abounding grace, that Christ would even call us his bride, his beloved, his covenant partner!

So here is our motivation to lead a holy life. Here is our motivation to repent from sin, to repent seriously and swiftly: We know that Christ has claimed us, He delights in us, and He goes with us in the fight, until we reach the end. So may each of us live in pure and undefiled devotion to Him, with our eyes and our hands and our everything—holy to God in body and spirit! Amen.

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