LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT LUST
MATTHEW 5:27-32

MAIN IDEA
Living without anger, contempt, the need to retaliate, and lust; enable kingdom people to love and respect God and people.

I. LIVING WITHOUT LUST (VS 27-30)
   *God’s kingdom people value the sacredness and dignity of others.*
   
   A. THE OLD TYPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (27)
   B. JESUS’ KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS (28)
   C. TWO SOLUTIONS (29-30)
      1. ABSURD SOLUTIONS
      2. MAKING A PLAN

II. LIVING WITH LOVE AND COMMITMENT (VS 31-32)
   *Because God’s people live without anger, contempt, the need to retaliate, and lust; they use their energies to love God and others with the love of Jesus.*
   
   A. THE OLD TYPE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (31)
      1. THE REASON FOR THE CERTIFICATE
         a. HARDNESS OF HEART
         b. PROTECTION FOR WOMEN
         c. THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN
      2. NO PENALTIES FOR MEN
   B. JESUS’ KINGDOM RIGHTEOUSNESS (32)
   C. GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE
Learning to Live Without Lust
Matthew 5:27-32

Note: Everything I am preaching in this series on the Sermon on the Mount is taken directly from the following sources. There is not much that is original thinking on my part:

- The Gospel of Matthew by William Barclay
- Be Loyal by Warren Wiersbe
- The Divine Conspiracy by Dallas Willard
- Celebration of Disciplines and Workbook by Richard Foster
- The Good and Beautiful Life by James Bryan Smith

In order to understand the logical order of the sermon, we need to review what we have learned already. Jesus laid out qualities He expected of people who wanted to live in His Kingdom. He said His people would be characterized by attitudes of loving-kindness, humility, courage, peace loving, pure hearted and good hearted.

He summarized that thought by stating that our righteousness must surpass simply keeping religious rules and regulations. He said our righteousness must be consistent with His heart, His nature, and His character. In other words, Jesus wants all of us; our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies. He wants to be the source of all we think, say, and do. Jesus’ righteousness is focused on loving God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul. That kind of love then flows into us and then overflows us onto others around us. We are to love others with the same kind of sacrificial love He loves us with. That love is what advances His Kingdom in which the final goal is to redeem all of creation.

Next He compared the old righteousness with His Kingdom righteousness. We learned that we need to live without anger. In other words, we must learn to deal with unresolved anger, we must not lash out or act out in anger, and we must not have a contemptuous attitude towards other people. He also commands us to not look for revenge or to retaliate against people.

As an antidote, God’s Kingdom people live in God’s love, God’s provision, and God’s presence. That’s how we are able to be able to answer evil with good, extend grace, and be generous with our time, money, resources, and love.

Can you imagine how many problems would be solved if we lived without anger, contempt, and the need to retaliate? That’s what it should be like to live in God’s Kingdom. If we are Christians and if this is a Christian church; that’s what life should be like here.

This morning, we are going to add to this learning to live without lust. In our culture, this is going to be quite a difficult task for us to live without lust. We are bombarded with sexual images every day. One day three of us were watching television. I was out west so I had never seen this commercial before. All of a sudden a commercial for a fast food restaurant came on. It had to be
the most sexually explicit commercial I had ever seen. It was erotic and I just sat there stunned. I exclaimed, “What was that?” The woman with us said, “That was the most disgusting hamburger commercial I have ever seen. My other friend said, ”There was a hamburger in the commercial?” Like it or not; we are going to be hit with sexual images every day. However, if we have a right attitude, we will be able to not be fooled by them. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. LIVING WITHOUT ANGER, CONTEMPT, THE NEED TO RETALIATE, AND LUST; ENABLE KINGDOM PEOPLE TO LOVE AND RESPECT GOD AND PEOPLE. Perhaps the most important point that needs to be repeated throughout our study through the Sermon on the Mount is that with our own human willpower, we cannot accomplish what Jesus is after. It is only the power of God that flows in and through us as we remain in an intimate relationship with Jesus; that we can be the people He wants us to be.

I. LIVING WITHOUT LUST (VS 27-30)

In verses 27-30 Jesus gives us a vision of what living without lust looks like. GOD’S KINGDOM PEOPLE VALUE THE SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF OTHERS. I think we need to go back to creation and state Jesus’ principle up front:

> 26 Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground. 27 So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’ … 31 Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! …

*Genesis 1:26-31 / New Living Translation*

We are God’s special creation. Nothing in all creation is created in His image except for human beings. Each human being, male and female, red, yellow, black, and white; are created in God’s image. Each individual human being is created in God’s image. Each and every individual human being is valuable and precious to God.

For our study we should also look to God’s statement concerning marriage in the creation account:

> 24 ... a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

*Genesis 2:24 / New Living Translation*

This definition of marriage describes a special social, relational, and sexual bond that is not to be violated in any way. This bond unites the couple spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is with this in mind that Jesus addresses this section of the sermon.

In verse 27 Jesus restates the old type of righteousness. He simply quotes Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18, “You shall not commit adultery.” Whatever criticism we lay at the feet of the religious leaders of the day; at least they took seriously this command of not committing adultery. Under the Old Testament Law, adultery was punished by death. The Law stated:
“If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the woman must die. In this way, you will purge Israel of such evil”

Deuteronomy 22:22 / New Living Translation

By the time Jesus came on the scene, it seems as if only women were put to death for adultery; not men. However, that was not God’s rule; that was man’s rule.

The New Testament writers took adultery and sexual immorality seriously as well. Listen carefully to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

9 Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, 10 or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 / New Living Translation

Maybe our society and the modern day church doesn’t take adultery and sexual immorality seriously; but make no mistake, God does. That is why Jesus reinforces these thoughts in verse 28 by describing His Kingdom righteousness. He says that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. He is not saying that actual adultery is no worse than lusting just like He wasn’t saying that actual murder is no worse than hate and anger. He is saying that entertaining this lust is already degrading and disrespectful to the woman. The word Jesus uses here for lust is epithumía. We discussed this word at length in our sermons through the book of Titus. If you want to review them, go to devonchurch.org and read the sermons on Titus 2:11-15 and Titus 3:1-11. Let me just summarize the meaning like this. Epithumía refers to our appetites, desires, and drives run wild. They are the lusts to gain power, pleasure, wealth, notoriety; all the things the world desires. These are all connected to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. This has to do with objectifying another person for our own pleasure. Lust has to do with the fantasy of possessing, owning, and seizing something for our own. It obsessively focuses on and seeks especially things that are forbidden.

Let me first define what this is not. This has nothing to do with noticing someone. I think in his book The Good and Beautiful Life, James Bryan Smith does a nice job:

“The word that is used for lust in this passage is epithumía. This word had a very specific meaning. It does not refer to ordinary sexual attraction but to intentionally objectifying another person for one’s own gratification. When I discuss this issue with students, I describe it this way: Epithumía is not referring to the first look but to the second. The first look may be simple attraction, but the second look is leering. Lust does not value the person but mere body parts.

Epithumía goes beyond mere sexual attraction. It intentionally cultivates sexual desire for the sake of the felling itself. It is the opposite of love.”

I can’t improve on his description. Suffice it to say that God created us in His image to love and respect one another. Lust of all kinds; for pleasure, power, wealth, or notoriety; ends up objectifying other people. We said the correct formula is to use things to love God and other
people. Lust perverts that into loving things while using God and other people to get what we want.

Before we leave this concept of lust and adultery, we have to realize that lust breaks the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife,” found in Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21. Verses 29-30 suggest two solutions. First, let’s look at some absurd solutions. Dallas Willard says that Jesus is dealing with this from an absurd position. In other words, if someone merely wants to literally obey the commandment of not lusting after a woman, he could poke his eyes out and cut off his hands. But as Willard points out, this does nothing to change the heart. Here is how Dallas reasons. Referring to the legalists he says:

“In their view, the law could be satisfied, and thus goodness attained, if you avoided sinning. You are right if you have done nothing wrong. You could avoid sinning if you simply eliminated the bodily parts that make sinful actions possible. Then you would roll into heaven a mutilated stump.

Of course being acceptable to God is so important that, if cutting bodily parts off could achieve it, one would be wise to cut them off. Jesus seems to have made this very point on some occasions (Matt. 18:8-9; Mark 9:43). But so far from suggesting that any advantage before God could actually be gained in this way, Jesus’ teaching in this passage is exactly the opposite. The mutilated stump could still have a wicked heart. The deeper question always concerns who you are, not what you did or can do. What would you do if you could? Eliminating bodily parts will not change that.

If you dismember your body to the point where you could never murder or even look hatefully at another, never commit adultery or even look to lust, your heart could still be full of anger, contempt, and obsessive desire for what is wrong, no matter how thoroughly stifled or suppressed it may be. ‘From within, out of the heart of men, the thoughts of evil proceed: fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, acts of greed and iniquity, as well as deceit, lewdness, the envious glare, blasphemy, arrogance and foolishness – all of these evils come from the inside and pollute the person’ (Mark 7:21-23)"

Many well-meaning men throughout history have tried to find ways to live without lusting after women. Groups of men left society to form monasteries. If they were never to see a woman, they couldn’t be guilty of lust. Other sects have developed and fostered a hatred for women; even their mothers and sisters.

The ultimate expression of this misguided approach is to hide women under layers of clothes; cover them from head to toe so it would be impossible to look at them and lust. We see this in modern day times. Women are covered in burqas.

The false premise is that women are the problem. The real problem as pointed out by Jesus; is the evil hearts of men. In our society, I would be remiss if I did not point out that sexual lust and other lusts reside in women as well as men.

Jesus indicates as do the other New Testament writers that the solution is to make a plan. Let’s start with what will not work. If I were to say right now, “I don’t want any of you to think about a pink elephant,” what do you start thinking of? You start thinking of a pink elephant. The way we stop lusting is to change our hearts. We need to replace our wrong thinking with right thinking. We need to take time to think about the truth that we are beings created in the image of God. God
values human beings; lust devalues and objectifies human beings. As children of God, we are on a mission to spread God’s Good News of reconciliation and redemption. Another thought that captures my mind is something the author of the book of Hebrews brought up. The author indicated that there are angels walking around in the appearance of human beings. Anyone who has read the passages in the Bible that describe angels knows they are scary. They are ferocious. When angels approach human beings; humans are overwhelmed; some faint, some are tempted to worship, and others seem to shake and throw up. Let’s say we were sitting at a table in a bar; and lusting after a woman sitting at the bar. All of a sudden, the woman we were lusting after transforms into the ferocious and terrifying angel that she is. How would we feel then? The point is the same. If we are lusting after someone; we are actually objectifying and degrading God. This is serious stuff. Jesus makes it clear that if we mess with God’s people; God will mess with us. We need to fill our hearts, minds, and souls with godly thoughts. In other words, we need to cultivate good habits and learn not to accept what society is selling us. Clearly we need to stay away from pornography and other sexually explicit materials. You can block the television channels that are no good for you. You can block websites and put parental controls on your computer. When watching television, analyze what the programs are teaching and analyze the commercials. They are almost never selling what they are advertising. Paul put it this way:

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9 / New Living Translation

As we think Godly thoughts, and as we think, speak, and act in Godly ways; God will grace us with His love, His provision, and His presence. Again, I will sum this up with Dallas Willard’s thoughts:

The goodness of the kingdom heart ... is the positive love of God and of those around us that fills it and crowds out the many forms of evil... From that goodness come deeds of respect and purity that characterize a sexuality as it was meant by God to be.

Sex was created by God to be a special act of intimacy to be expressed only in the context of marriage between a husband and a wife. We have lost that in our culture and I’m not sure if it can ever be regained again. Because of promiscuousness and sexual immorality; not many men and women will ever be able to experience the beauty of sex as designed by God. It is rare indeed to find people entering into marriage with their virginity intact. If you’re not yet married and still a virgin, please remain a virgin; because God has a very special gift for you when you get married.

People try and say the church teaches that sex is evil; and there have been periods in history where that was the case. However, the Bible teaches that sex in marriage is a beautiful thing. But people who have had sex before entering marriage have marred that gift. The Apostle Paul teaches that when we have sex with someone, our souls are united (I Corinthians 6:15-20). Every time we have sex, with someone who will ultimately not become our husband or wife; we leave a part of our soul behind. When we have sex with someone; we are actually having sex with everyone they had sex with before and they are having sex with everyone we have had sex with before. Therefore, we have really diluted the pleasure and power of sex the way God designed it for.
The point Jesus is making is this. GOD’S KINGDOM PEOPLE VALUE THE SACREDNESS AND DIGNITY OF OTHERS. Before we get into this section on divorce, I want to make sure I am clear that we are not studying through the full topic of divorce; merely the causes. The Bible makes it clear that there are certain situations where divorce is acceptable. Let me give you this reference in case you want to seriously study these situations. Craig Bloomberg did a very nice job on the topic. His article is found in the Trinity Journal, the Fall 1990 volume (TRINJ 11:2). The article is titled “Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, And Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12.”

II. LIVING WITH LOVE AND COMMITMENT (VS 31-32)

Verses 31-32 describe what living with love and commitment in God's Kingdom looks like. BECAUSE GOD'S PEOPLE LIVE WITHOUT ANGER, CONTEMPT, THE NEED TO RETALIATE, AND LUST; THEY USE THEIR ENERGIES TO LOVE GOD AND OTHERS WITH THE LOVE OF JESUS.

Jesus describes the old righteousness in verse 31. He summarizes the command found in Deuteronomy 24:1-2 by simply saying, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” So if a man were to divorce his wife and simply give her a written statement that she is no longer bound by the marriage, he would consider himself to be a righteous man. There were several reasons for the certificate of divorce.

First of all, the certificate was issued because of the hardness of heart. Here is the statement from the Old Testament Law:

1 Suppose a man marries a woman but she does not please him. Having discovered something wrong with her, he writes her a letter of divorce, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house. 2 When she leaves his house, she is free to marry another man.

_Deuteronomy 24:1-2 / New Living Translation_

By the time of Jesus, two rabbinic schools dominated the thinking concerning this. The debated phrase was “having found something wrong with her.” The school of Shammai was very conservative. Rabbi Shammi only allowed divorce for infidelity. If the woman committed adultery, the husband could legitimately divorce her.

On the other hand, the school of Hillel was much more liberal. Rabbi Hillel interpreted this phrase of finding something wrong to apply to something as insignificant as a wife burning the dinner. So if a man’s wife burned the dinner, and if he did not beat her but merely divorced her and gave her a certificate of divorce; he would consider himself to be a standup guy. This school was so ridiculous that Rabbi Akiba said that if a man found a woman prettier than his wife, he could divorce his wife and marry the prettier girl.

Knowing the hardness of our hearts, I don’t think it’s too difficult to determine which school was the most popular. Men of the day married with the intention that if their wife wasn’t really doing it for them; they could divorce her. By giving her a certificate of divorce, they fancied themselves to be righteous. For the most part, divorce was a matter of hard hearts.

In Moses’ day, giving the woman a certificate was meant to protect her. If a husband couldn’t divorce his wife, he may abuse her and beat her to death. If he treated her like dirt every day; she
had no recourse. At least if the man divorced her, she would have a chance to live; although living may be too generous a word.

The plight of divorced women wasn’t too good. Basically she had three choices; none of them really good. She could return home to her parents’ house or a relative’s house. If she had really loving parents or relatives; she would be safe for the present. She would still have the social stigma of being divorced. Her second option would be to remarry. Again, if she is lucky and finds a really good man, that would be great; but the chances are in that culture, the man marrying a divorced woman would not be that great of a catch. He may hold the fact over the woman’s head that he rescued her and he may treat her with contempt. Her final option would to become a prostitute. So we can see that divorce was brutal for women.

Add this fact to complicate the issue; there was no penalty for a man divorcing his wife. There was no stigma and would carry no real consequences.

Jesus understands this whole situation and makes sure everyone that wants to follow Him understands this. In verse 32 Jesus lays out what Kingdom righteousness looks like. Jesus says that even though there may be some real legitimate reasons for divorce, once we remove anger, contempt, and the need to retaliate; and once we have our lusts under control; there would not be much occasion for divorce. And even the divorces that occur would be done in the context of a loving community and for the good of the couple. Indeed divorce would be rare. Personally think about this. If I am filled with God’s love, God’s provision, and God’s presence; I will want to love others; especially my spouse. If I am not petty and don’t hold a grudge and have no need to punish anyone; my spouse will feel loved, safe, and secure. If I am filled with humble and self-sacrificial loving-kindness; the chances are that I will not be controlled by lusts for pleasure, wealth, notoriety, and power. If I am controlled by the Holy Spirit; I will not degrade people in order to satisfy my lust.

God’s design for marriage is often spelled out throughout the Bible. God uses marriage as an example of the relationship He has with us. In the commandments, God said that we should not worship any idols nor should we chase after false gods. God is passionately faithful to us. He is filled with self-sacrificing loving-kindness for us. He approaches us with love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. He is faithful to us. He expects us to be faithful to Him. If we are to reflect God’s view of marriage; we need to be physically, emotionally, and spiritually faithful to our spouses. That sets the bar pretty high for people who want to follow Christ. BECAUSE GOD’S PEOPLE LIVE WITHOUT ANGER, CONTEMPT, THE NEED TO RETALIATE, AND LUST; THEY USE THEIR ENERGIES TO LOVE GOD AND OTHERS WITH THE LOVE OF JESUS. This section is not about simply not divorcing our spouses; this is about having attitudes that are consistent with living in Christ’s Kingdom. Dallas Willard summarizes this thought pretty graphically. In referring to lust he says:

Everyone knows about this kind of activity, and there are few who have not at some time engaged in it to some degree. No doubt the same was true even in Jesus’ day. But it goes on among all types of men, including ministers and university professors, and, in this day of equal opportunity, among women as well and between members of the same sex. Jesus’ teaching here is that a person who cultivates lusting in this manner is not the kind of person who is at home in the goodness of God’s kingdom.
So far, we could say this. People who cultivate anger, contempt, and the desire to get even along with lust will not feel comfortable in God’s Kingdom. The empowering thought however is this.

**LIVING WITHOUT ANGER, CONTEMPT, THE NEED TO RETALIATE, AND LUST; ENABLE KINGDOM PEOPLE TO LOVE AND RESPECT GOD AND PEOPLE.**

The spiritual discipline we are going to use in order to combat lust is **fasting**; however, this will not be an abstaining from food, it will be a media fast.

- Write down Philippians 4:8-10 on several note cards.
  
  8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

  Philippians 4:8-9 / New Living Translation

- Place these cards where you will see them during the day; on the mirror, at the table where you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner, at your computer, where you watch television, etc.

- Every time you see a card, prayerfully read the card.

- When watching television, make a note what the advertisers are trying to really sell you; other than the product. What will this product do for me, etc?

- Prepare for a 24 hour media fast. This fast will include not using any electronic media; television, radio, telephone, computer, games, iPods, iPads, mp3 players, etc. Also avoid newspapers and magazines. Obviously you will have to tell your family you will be doing this. You will need to plan carefully. For example, you can’t work if you can’t use the phone, computer, etc. Find a day you can abstain from all media.

- During your media fast day, try playing a game with friends and family. Go for a walk. Read a book. Spend time with friends.

- At the end of the fast, read Philippians 4:8-10 and write down the results of spending the day without media. Did you notice that your spirit was more at peace?

- Thank God that He is all you need; His love, His provision, and His presence.

**Lectio Divina** Colossians 3:1-17