

# Are you Sexually Pure?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, before we come to God's word, reading again from the Sermon on the Mount this afternoon,! We're going to sing our next song, which is Who You Say I Am. A song about basically adoption in Christ for those who know and love him.

So let's stand together as we sing. Who am I that the highest king would welcome me? I was lost, but He brought me in all His love for me.

And His love for me. And I'm set free, always free indeed.

I'm a child of God, yes I am. I'm set free, always free indeed.

I'm a child of God, yes I am. And I'm set free, always free indeed.

[ 1 : 34 ] And I'm set free, always free indeed.

I'm a child of God, yes I am. In my Father's house, there's a place for me.

I'm a child of God, yes I am. I am chosen, not forsaken.

I am who You say I am. You are for me, not against me. I am who You say I am.

I am who You say I am. When the fountain's free, always free indeed.

[ 2 : 45 ] I'm a child of God, yes I am. In my Father's house, there's a place for me.

I'm a child of God, yes I am. I am who you say I am.

Thank you to the band who led us in our praise up till now in our service. If you'd like to turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5. The words are also up on the screen and we're going to read from verse 27 through to 32.

Matthew 5, 27 to 32. Continuing our series in the Sermon on the Mount called Counter Cultural Living. This is the Word of God.

You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[ 4 : 04 ] If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away, it is better for you to lose one part of your body and for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it out, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body and for your whole body to go into hell.

It has been said anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery.

And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This is God's Word. Let's pray and ask for his help as we come and think about these verses together.

Our gracious God, we come before you today and you see us as we are. You know our hearts, you know our lives.

[ 5 : 11 ] They're like an open book to you. And so we need to hear from you about how we should live. And so we pray that we would hear your voice and that by the power of your spirit, you would point us to the Lord Jesus.

Remind us of his gospel and help us to go and live in the way that you call us to. For we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, we live in a sex saturated world where from the 1960s here in Western society, we've had what is known as the sexual revolution, which has pushed the boundaries of sexual freedom to the extent that now pretty much anything goes sexually just as long as it's consensual.

But the sexual revolution has been challenged over the past years and people are now wondering, well, whether it has actually delivered on all of its promises.

The promise of greater freedom, the promise of more love has it delivered on all that it said it would do. The best book that I've read on the subject is the case against the sexual revolution by Louise Perry.

[ 6 : 29 ] Now, Louise Perry is a feminist writer, and she argues persuasively in her book that the sexual revolution has not been good for our society. In fact, it's been really bad and it's been the worst for women in particular.

Women who have been forced to accommodate the excesses of male lust. And her book is really sobering reading because she painfully describes how sexual freedom has left so many women devastated and absolutely ruined.

And what she says is all the more fascinating because she's writing not as a Christian, but she's writing at the world as she sees it. And yet, despite this, one of the main reasons our culture is so opposed to Christianity is because of what Christianity teaches about sex and about marriage. And so people think, well, it's so backward. It is so outdated. It is so restrictive that we just don't want that in our world today. How can that be helpful to us and our flourishing as human beings? Listening to what the Bible teaches, what Jesus says about sex and marriage. Now, you'll have noticed in our Bible reading that Jesus makes it clear that there are consequences to our sexual choices.

[ 7 : 55 ] And Jesus calls his people to sexual purity in a sex saturated world, which is hardly surprising because what we've discovered in our studies in the Sermon on the Mount is that it is all about counter cultural living.

And so we see that the values of the values of the values of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, what Jesus teaches, those values are in direct contrast to the values of this world.

And so we see this again here when it comes to sexual ethics. And so all this whole area and as we read about adultery and lust and divorce and hell, this whole area may be sensitive and painful for some in particular.

And yet what Jesus says here applies to us all, whatever our relationship status, single, married, to be married, divorce, whatever it is, what Jesus says here applies to us all.

Because when we deviate from God's good purposes for sex and for marriage, then we do so at great cost to ourselves, but also at great cost to all those that we are in relationships with.

[ 9 : 12 ] And so what Jesus teaches us here is how God's good story for sex is bigger and better and deeper than the story our world tells us about sex.

And so Jesus shows us how God's purpose, God's plan actually makes complete sense. And it is what enables us to flourish best as human beings.

And so we're going to think about what Jesus says under these three headings. God's good story for sex is bigger, it's better and it's deeper. So first of all, God's good story for sex is bigger.

Now, we just read two sections in the Sermon on the Mount. And in the first section, verse 27 to 30, you'll see Jesus speaks about adultery and lust.

Then in the second section, verse 31 and 32, he speaks about divorce and adultery. And what unites both these sections is that they're both about committing adultery.

[ 10 : 15 ] Did you notice that verse 28? It's about those committing adultery. And then verse 32, it's about those, the one who commits adultery.

And so Jesus is saying here in the first section, we can commit adultery through lust. And in the second section, he's saying we can commit adultery through divorce.

And so whether it's through adultery in the heart because of the lustful look, or whether it's adultery after marriage as a result of wrongful divorce, Jesus is warning here of the danger of breaking the seventh commandment, which is you shall not commit adultery.

He's warning of the danger of breaking this in ways that we probably wouldn't even think are adultery. Now, this is the same approach that if you were here last week, you would note that Jesus took when it came to the sixth commandment, which is you shall not murder, where you can be guilty of breaking that commandment without physically murdering somebody.

So he's saying again, you can be guilty of breaking the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery, without physically having sex with someone who isn't your spouse.

[ 11 : 40 ] So what Jesus is doing here again is he is deepening and he is intensifying the application of God's commandments, because God's law requires more than just outward conformity.

It demands a radical obedience of the heart. That's what Jesus is driving home here. So let's read verse 27 and 28. You have heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery.

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So the underlying principle here is faithfulness.

He's talking about marriage, adultery, so faithfulness, but also sexual purity, because he's talking about lust in our hearts, because it would be easy to believe that you were keeping this commandment just as long as you're not having sex with someone who isn't your spouse.

And that is what people would have heard the Pharisees and the teachers of the law saying, where they could take pride in themselves for keeping the letter of the law.

[12:58] You have not murdered anyone. Tick. Well done. You've obeyed that commandment. You've not committed adultery by physically having sex with someone who isn't your spouse. Tick. You've kept the commandment.

But Jesus is saying here, it's not just about keeping the letter of the law. It's about the spirit of the law. And that's why he drills down with this deeper application of God's law to our lives, because there's more to keeping God's commandments than by seeing just how close to the line you can go without breaking them or how far you can go without breaking them.

What he's pointing to is there's got to be this desire in our hearts to want to obey the God who gave these commandments for our good and for our blessing and for our human flourishing.

Because Jesus is teaching how God's good story for sex and marriage is bigger than a commandment that simply comes in the negative and says, you shall not commit adultery.

Because around this commandment, there is a bigger story with a positive context for why there is this prohibition. And of course, this begins in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, where God lays the foundations for sex and marriage, where sex is this precious gift from our loving creator God, because he made man and woman for each other.

[14:33] And in Genesis chapter one, verse 28, God's first command to the man and to the woman is basically have sex. Listen, God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.

So straight away in Genesis, we're told sex is part of God's good creation right in the beginning. So God designed sex to unite a man and a woman within this lifelong commitment of marriage.

And so God's definition of marriage also comes in Genesis, in Genesis chapter two, verse 24, we read, that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh.

In other words, marriage was designed to be this exclusive and permanent relationship between one man and one woman where they are bound together as one.

This one flesh union basically expresses the strongest commitment possible. And so the giving of ourselves fully and exclusively and permanently to another person is meant to be within the context of marriage.

[15:52] That's how God designed it. And so sex is God's way for a man and a woman to express this commitment to one another.

And also to strengthen this commitment to each other. And so it's hardly surprising then if sex is so precious and so powerful that God would give restrictions on its proper use for us as human beings. Because if we use his good gift wrongly, we only damage ourselves and all of those around about us. And so as we read Jesus words here in the Sermon on the Mount, when he raises the issue of adultery and when he tackles the issue of divorce, it is all grounded in this foundation of God's good design for sex and marriage.

And so this commandment, you shall not commit adultery is serious because sex is powerful, so it shouldn't be misused. And marriage is designed to be permanent, so it shouldn't end in divorce. But of course we live in a fallen and a broken world. So it doesn't always work as God designed it to be. And so adultery breaks this marriage covenant.

[17:13] And it was such a heinous offense in the Old Testament that it was punishable by death. And that's why the commandment, you shall not commit adultery, demands faithfulness in marriage.

And it's kept not merely by avoiding adultery, but as with all of God's commandments, it does prohibit something, but then it also obliges us to do something else.

And so obeying the commandment is not just avoiding adultery, but it's living faithfully to the one you're married to. So the marriage is meant to put a barrier around a husband and wife and to destroy all barriers between them.

To enable this full expression of love as God planned it to be. And so before we move on, God's good story is actually even bigger still.

Because God's story, the story of the Bible, is the greatest love story. Because human marriage is meant to be a window or a picture onto a far greater marriage.

[ 18 : 41 ] The marriage between God and his people. About God entering into a covenant relationship with his people where he is fully and exclusively and permanently committed to them.

And you see that all the way through the Old Testament. And then when you get to the New Testament, it is even more explicitly expressed when Paul, in Ephesians chapter 5, talks about husbands and wives.

And he says, And this is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.

And so the one flesh union of marriage is a picture of the ultimate union between God and his people, between Christ and his church. And so the one flesh union of marriage is a great church.

And so the whole Bible story is a great love story.

[ 19 : 43 ] One where God enters into a relationship of covenant faithfulness with people like you and me. Where he loves us.

And he has declared his love for us. And he continues to love us. And he will never leave us. No divorce between him and us.

And so Jesus teaching here in the Sermon on the Mount is far more than just a few abstract ethical commands that restrict your sexual freedom.

It's far more than just that. It forms part of this bigger story. This bigger story of God's loving purposes for how we relate to one another as human beings, but also of this marriage between God and his people that it points to.

So that's the first point. God's good story for sex is bigger. Secondly, God's good story for sex is better. Because what Jesus says here about divorce follows on naturally from what he says about adultery.

[ 20 : 48 ] And he picks up again on the way that the scriptures have been wrongly interpreted and applied, just like he did about murder last week with the sixth commandment. So let's read verse 31 and 32 again.

It has been said anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality makes her the victim of adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Okay, so if this underlying principle of the seventh commandment is faithfulness and sexual purity, then according to Jesus, then there should be no reason for divorce except for sexual immorality.

That's the only legitimate grounds for divorce that he gives here. Now, Jesus expands again on the subject marriage and divorce in Matthew chapter 19.

And there's more about what he says there. And so we can't cover everything about what he says about divorce merely from just these couple of verses.

[ 22 : 04 ] And that's why we've got to remember this bigger and better story. Because the reason Jesus speaks against divorce is because Jesus is for marriage.

He is pro-marriage. And if he's pro-marriage, then obviously he will be against divorce. Now we'll come back to the text in just a moment. But Jesus' words continue just to be as relevant today as they ever were.

Because a few years back, no-fault divorce laws were introduced in England and Wales. And so before these no-fault divorce laws came in, people wanting to divorce their spouse had to prove that their marriage had irretrievably broken down through either adultery or unreasonable behaviour.

Or desertion or separation. But then the law basically removed a requirement of blame for getting a divorce.

And at the time, the columnist Amanda Plattel said this. She said, however much this law tries to redefine the dissolution of a marriage as quick and no-fault, the undeniable truth remains that divorce hurts.

[ 23 : 23 ] It hurts everyone involved. And I'm sure she speaks for everybody who has been through a divorce and knows the hurt and the pain that such a thing causes.

And so when Jesus raises this issue of divorce, he gives this one exception for it here, which is sexual immorality.

The word that's used is the word pornea. Because sexual unfaithfulness, Jesus is saying destroys the marriage bond. If marriage is a covenant relationship, then unfaithfulness in that relationship destroys it.

And so Jesus won't tolerate the easy divorce that was being practiced in his day, which opposes God's design for marriage as this covenant relationship of lifelong faithfulness.

And it was happening because, again, the scriptures had been distorted in Jesus' day by the very people who ought to be teaching the scriptures. They were twisting them.

[ 24 : 31 ] The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5.

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The verse 5. The verse 5. The verse 5. something indecent about her and so this law was permitted to safeguard the wife to protect her but in Jesus day it had been used basically as an escape clause for the husband and so there was a debate over in Jesus day a debate over what exactly something indecent meant and it had been twisted to the extent that a man could divorce his wife for pretty much anything and so it says that basically she burnt his dinner for example and he could claim he had legitimate grounds for divorce and that's why Jesus here forbids divorce except on the grounds of adultery because it was too easy for men to get shot of their wives because the wrongful divorce he says makes her commit adultery too and then anyone who marries her he says also commits adultery and so at the heart of what Jesus is saying here about divorce what he's doing is he is seeking to uphold uphold the beauty of marriage marriage because when wrongful divorce takes place it multiplies the sin and even implicates others in it and so while divorce is never desirable it's permissible on the grounds of sexual immorality now I don't think anyone goes into a marriage either expecting or wanting a divorce to take place but because we live in a fallen world because we are sinful men and women then sin spoils everything and so sin spoils our relationships even our closest relationships like in a marriage and especially through sexual immorality because sex is such a powerful force now at home in our house we've got a log burning stove and it's brilliant it's in the lounge and within a few minutes you can start a really powerful fire that heats the room up but then spreads warmth all around the rest of the house but the stove is the only place in our house where you can start a fire it's going to be dangerous and cause damage anywhere else if you try and start a fire out with the confines of this log burning stove as a fire we know when it's used in the right setting it is delightful but fire if it's used in the wrong setting might be good for a moment but ultimately it is destructive and that's really how we should understand sex isn't it it can be a powerful force that is both delightful and destructive and so God gives it to be used in the context of marriage to unite and to deepen love but then outside that context they can do great damage to ourselves and to other people so where there's adultery and unfaithfulness Jesus is saying divorce is allowable now divorce obviously is the product of sin but that doesn't mean that every divorce is sinful sometimes it is necessary and so whether back then or now Jesus is showing us how God's good story for sex and marriage is better isn't it it's better than what our world says where husband and wife take vows on their wedding day and promise to be exclusively and permanently committed to one another

that is better than meet up and hook up and shack up isn't it and then when you get fed up just head off and find somebody else so Jesus is pointing here to the beautiful ideal of how we flourish best as human beings in this world that God has made and that's why those who are married should work hard at staying together taking every precaution to avoid the selfish sin that can wreck a marriage and making every effort to be faithful in every way just think about flying an airplane if you're a pilot you don't learn how to fly an airplane by concentrating the whole time on crash landing like if you get your crash landing perfect that doesn't mean you're a good pilot who can fly a plane and what Jesus is saying here and what he wants for his people and all people is to enjoy the beauty of flying in the air to stay up there and enjoy the journey not to bail out when there's some turbulence and crash land and so Jesus is presenting God's plan for how marriage was meant to be and so thirdly let's look at God's good story for sex and how it is when Jesus speaks about adultery and divorce he goes further and deeper than just her outward behaviour doesn't he

Verse 28, but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. The Greek word for lustfully means to long for or to desire, to covet, to set your heart upon.

[ 30 : 54 ] And that's why looking lustfully is committing adultery in the heart, because the sin is when the look is in order to lust.

When somebody else becomes the object of our desire, that's lust. Whenever we imagine the possibilities of what could be, we commit adultery in our hearts.

Because the heart is the source of all sin. And so obviously it's the source of sexual sin as well. It's the desires of our heart that will lead to what we look at with our eyes and what we do with our hands.

So see what Jesus says, verse 29 and 30. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

[ 32 : 03 ] Now Jesus uses such vivid images here, doesn't he? But that's because he wants us to know how serious this is. So looking in order to lust leads not just to adultery, whether in our bodies or with our hearts, but it actually leads to hell.

That's what he's saying. And that's where all sin will take us if it is not dealt with in this life. And so no wonder Jesus advises such drastic action because he wants us to save ourselves.

Drastic action is needed. You've probably heard of those stories of people who have been trapped under a boulder or against a wall. And they shouted for help and help has not come.

And the only way they can get out of their predicament and save themselves is by chopping off a limb. And then escaping, losing a limb in order to save a life.

That's what Jesus is saying here. And of course he is not talking literally. That's not how we should take his words. Gouge out your eye.

[ 33 : 11 ] Cut off your hand. Although some Christians have read his words in that way. Apparently, Origen, the early Christian leader, castrated himself because of his lust.

But that can't actually work, can it? Losing an eye or a hand or any other body part for that matter won't stop lust, will it?

Why? Because the issue lies deeper down. It lies in our hearts. And so Jesus is using hyperbole here to highlight the drastic action needed to stop us from sinning.

Jesus wants us to act quickly and decisively, even if it's painful, to stop any sin in our lives. We're to perform surgery on ourselves, metaphorically speaking, to cut out what can kill us.

This is what the older theologians called mortification. John Owen, the Puritan, wrote a book called *The Mortification of Sin*. And he said, always be killing sin or it will be killing you.

[ 34 : 20 ] That's what Jesus is talking about here. And he's telling us to protect ourselves. So don't dabble with it, flirt with it, normalize it, accept it or live with it.

Because sin will kill you. So avoid it, run from it, hate it, get rid of it. And the issue for us as well, do we really want to?

Now, there are sexual images everywhere these days. Last Saturday night, I sat down and watched the Brit Awards. It was on live and I watched it for five minutes.

And Stormzy was there and he thanked God for his award. And then a woman came on, I forget her name. But she had this barely there dress. There was nothing to it.

But that's common, isn't it? That's the norm rather than the exception. Everything is getting more explicit when it comes to sex in our culture. Everywhere we look, there is plenty encouragement for our eyes to lust.

[ 35 : 25 ] Just think about it. Porn is free to watch with the click of a mouse on a computer. And it's easy to access with a swipe on your smartphone. And so when it comes to the area of lust and sexual purity, Jesus describes how our eyes in particular cause us to sin.

And so what he's asking of us and telling us we must do is to take action to blind ourselves. Not gouging out our eye, but to somehow blind ourselves so we can't see what will do us harm.

How can we do that? Well, maybe cancel the Netflix subscription on our TV or delete that particular app on our phone.

Or block those websites, have stronger filters on our computer, install accountability software like Covenant Eyes. And whatever the screen is that is causing us to lust, Jesus says, get rid of it.

Don't use it. And so our approach will reflect how seriously we regard our sexual purity. And I guess we might be thinking, well, how can we gauge our progress in this whole area?

[ 36 : 44 ] Well, I think our hearts will be reflected in the watched list on our Netflix account. They'll be reflected in who we follow on Instagram or on TikTok, on our internet browsing history.

Or what the algorithms throw up in our social media feeds. That will be a good gauge, an indication of what is really going on in our hearts, won't it?

Because Jesus is saying here that all this does have potential to damage you and also damage your family.

Those you're in closest relationships with. And so he's saying it doesn't need to go all the way to a physical adulterous affair. It can happen with your look because it's in your heart.

And so can you see how what Jesus is teaching here really does apply to all of us, whether we are single or married, an adult or a teenager? Which one of us has never looked with lust?

[ 37 : 52 ] We surely feel the challenge of Jesus' words here, don't we? Perhaps we even feel the guilt and shame, maybe because of what we've done in the past, or maybe because of what we're doing now that we know definitely needs to stop.

You see, according to Jesus, we are all sexual sinners. Maybe in our actions, but certainly in our hearts.

And so we all need forgiveness. But the good news is that we can receive forgiveness for every sin, including every sexual sin from Jesus.

And I'm sure that Jesus doesn't want us to leave feeling hopeless or defeated or in despair.

Whether because we are an unbeliever who has deliberately rejected God's good story for sex, or because we are a believer who has knowingly stumbled from God's good story for sex.

We've all failed to keep the commandment on adultery at its deepest level in our hearts. And so while hell is real, and your sin and my sin will take us there if it is not dealt with, it need not take us there.

[ 39 : 18 ] That's the hope that comes from this passage and from the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus always gives us hope. Because you notice that what he says here in verse 29 and 30 is that gouging out the offending eye and cutting off the offending hand is the way to save your life.

In other words, action can be taken and must be taken to avoid hell and to grasp hold of the eternal life that Jesus wants to give us.

And so it means that nobody's story has reached the end yet. Nobody's life is yet over. No matter what the previous chapters of our life story contain, sexual failure, adultery, divorce, regrets, mistakes, mess, whatever it might be, we should never ever think that our poor life choices mean that we can do nothing more than abandon ourselves to sin.

That's not what Jesus wants for any of us. Some sin will never be forgotten, but it can be forgiven.

And while you may have to live with the consequences of sexual sin, you don't have to live with the guilt or with the shame.

Because Jesus came not just to be a teacher, to teach us all this, he came to be our saviour. Which means that Jesus is the only one who perfectly kept this commandment.

[ 41 : 03 ] He never committed adultery. He never looked at a woman lustfully. Jesus lived a full and yet sexually pure life.

And so Jesus not only fulfills the seventh commandment for us, but he takes the punishment that we deserve for breaking it. And isn't that the best news ever?

For every one of our broken lives and our sinful hearts. And so we should never be afraid of running to Jesus Christ, no matter what we have done.

I wonder if you've seen the movie Cinderella. Not my normal genre of movie. In fact, ever my genre of movie. But there's a line in the movie and Cinderella says, perhaps the greatest risk any of us will ever take is to be seen as we really are.

You know, Jesus sees us as we really are. And he loves us. Despite what we are. And his love is so amazing that he came from heaven and he went to the cross for us.

[ 42 : 16 ] Which means that he is faithfully committed to us now and he will be forever. That covenant he has made with us, God has made with us through him, will never be broken.

And yet Jesus doesn't want us to stay as we are, does he? He wants to transform our lives and our relationships into what they should be. And so through the power of his spirit, this transformation happens for our good.

And it happens for the blessing of all of those that we are related to. And it happens for the glory of God. And that's why we've got to seek to honour him in our hearts and with our bodies. And never ever doubt that God's good story for sex is bigger and better and deeper than anything this world says to us.  
Let's pray together.