

Matthew 5:27–30 — Adultery Begins in the Heart

First we get to the words of Jesus and then I'll speak from personal experience.

27 “You have heard that it was said to those of old,
'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

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.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off 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.

The Oldest Middle English Translation (Wycliffe Bible, 1382)

“But I seie to you, that every man that seeth a womman to coveyte hir,
hath now don letcherie bi hir in his herte.”

This preserves a very medieval understanding: “coveyte hir” → covets her;
“lecherie” → sexual sin.

In Wycliffe's time:

- lecherie = sexual coveting
- lecher = one who covets
- to lech = to desire someone improperly

It did not originally mean merely “lustful” or “immoral.” It meant a person
whose desire reaches outward in covetous intention.

**A “lecher” is literally “a coveter,” specifically coveting someone
sexually.**

The Greek Word For Lust: ἐπιθυμέω (epithyméō)

This is the verb Jesus uses.

Meaning in 1st-century Greek:

- to set one's desire upon
- to long for intentionally
- to covet
- to direct the will toward possessing

This is not passive noticing.

It's an act of inner grasping — a movement of the will.

It's the same verb used in the Greek Old Testament for the Tenth Commandment:

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.”

(Exodus 20:17 LXX — ouk epithymēseis)

So Jesus is quoting the command directly, but applying it inwardly.

The Earliest English Clarifies This Old English (990 AD)

“locað wif to luste”

meaning: “look at a woman toward lusting, with the intention to desire.”

This describes an aim, not a reaction.

Wycliffe (1382)

“seeth a womman to coveyte hir”

Wycliffe uses covet — aligning directly with the Tenth Commandment.

KJV (1611)

“looketh on a woman to lust after her”

Again: “to” implies intention, not spontaneous feeling.

Attraction is involuntary. Lust is intentional.

- Attraction happens to you.
- Lust is something you do.

Attraction is noticing beauty. Lust is aiming desire to possess someone.

Attraction is a reaction. Lust is a direction.

Jesus is not condemning:

- the biological reaction to beauty
- the initial emotional spark
- the awareness of someone being lovely

He is addressing the inner movement of grasping — the will turning toward possession or use.

This is why He ties it to adultery:

- Adultery is taking something not given.
- Lust is the inward preparation and intention to take.

“Lust is the inward decision to use someone for our own gratification — even if the outward act never happens.”

Jesus always locates sin in the source, not the outcome

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly shows:

- Anger → root of murder
- Coveting/lust → root of adultery

This mirrors His teaching in Matt 15:19:

“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries...”

The act is merely the fruit.

The desire is the tree.

Inward lust reveals the truth of a person's will

The outward act may be prevented by circumstance, fear, shame, or lack of opportunity. The inward lust is prevented only by the truth of the heart.

The inward movement of the will is the true moral reality.

The inward desire violates the personhood of another

Inward lust treats the other person as:

- an object
- a possession
- a means to gratification
- a tool for imagined pleasure

Even if no act is committed, the heart has already:

- reduced their dignity
- stripped their divine image
- taken something from them in imagination
- used them as an object

Inward lust fractures relationship, purity, and honor, even in the private realm.

Inward sin is not restrained by external consequences

Outward sins can be stopped by:

- law
- society
- lack of opportunity
- fear
- physical limitations

But inward sins:

- exist unrestricted
- are committed in the imagination
- can be practiced endlessly
- can grow unchecked
- shape the heart into corruption

Jesus is targeting the reality beyond human law — the realm where moral truth actually lives.

The NEXT Verses

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.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off 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.

Radical inward remedy-

HELL

The word Jesus uses here is Gehenna (γέεννα).

Not:

- Hades (the realm of the dead),
- not Sheol (Hebrew underworld),
- not Tartarus (Greek mythological prison),
- but specifically: GEHENNA — “the Valley of Hinnom.”

What Gehenna meant to Jesus’ hearers

Gehenna was:

- a real physical valley just south of Jerusalem
- a place associated with ancient Israel’s darkest sins
- the site where children were once sacrificed to Molech
- cursed ground
- later used as a burning garbage pit in Jesus’ day
- constantly smoldering with fire, smoke, and decay

So in the Jewish imagination: **Gehenna = the symbolic image of what happens when the heart becomes corrupted, defiled, and destroyed from the inside.**

It is not primarily about:

- God throwing people into fire
- a medieval hellscape
- post-death punishment imagery

It is about the ultimate ruin of the self — the collapse of who you truly are.

Why Jesus uses Gehenna in verses 29–30

Because He is not talking about:

- gouging out literal eyes
- cutting off literal hands
- punishing misbehaving bodies

He is teaching that inward corruption destroys the whole person more surely than any physical loss.

Thus:

“It is better that one of your members perish
than for your whole self to be thrown into Gehenna.”

In other words:

“It is better to lose anything — any habit, pattern, identity-piece —
than to let your heart become corrupted and fall into ruin.”

He is speaking of inner destruction, not bodily punishment.

Why this matters for 28–29 specifically

Jesus is talking about:

- the heart,
not the outward act.

And He uses bodily imagery as metaphor to teach:

The corruption of the heart is more dangerous than the loss of any bodily member.

Because:

- Losing a hand does not destroy you.
- Losing your heart’s purity does.
- Losing an eye does not ruin your life.
- Losing your inward integrity does.
- Losing a limb does not corrupt the soul.
- Losing the heart to coveting does.

This is why Gehenna is the perfect word in His teaching.

It means: **If you don’t address inward corruption, it will destroy your whole self the way Gehenna destroys everything thrown into it.**

RIGHT AND LEFT

In Jewish thought, the **RIGHT** side is the side of **STRENGTH** and **HONOR**

All throughout Scripture:

- The right hand is the hand of power
- The right arm is the arm of might
- The right eye is the stronger, more valuable eye
- The right side is the side of blessing

Examples:

- “Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power” (Ex. 15:6)
- “Sit at My right hand...” (Psalm 110:1)
- “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly” (Psalm 118:15)
- “Jesus stands at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:55)

In the ancient world, the right side was:

- the dominant side
- the preferred side
- the honoured side
- the side used for blessing
- the side used in oaths
- the side of skill and action

So Jesus isn't saying:

“Remove a random part of your life.” He's saying:

“Remove even the STRONGEST, most valuable part of your inner life if it cooperates with sin.”

The Right Eye = Your Dominant Way of Seeing / Imagining

The right eye symbolizes:

- your strongest way of perceiving
- your preferred gaze
- your natural inclination of imagination
- the part of your inner vision you rely on most

If the way you naturally SEE things inwardly is feeding the sin, you must be willing to give up even your dominant way of viewing the world.

The Right Hand = Your Dominant WILL / Capability / Action

The right hand symbolizes:

- your power to act
- your dominant skill
- your strongest faculty
- your capacity
- your will
- your initiative
- your ability to “reach out” inwardly

In Scripture, a person’s RIGHT HAND is their:

- identity
- strength
- competence
- authority
- ability to bless

Jesus is essentially saying:

If even your strongest qualities, your most gifted parts, your greatest abilities, begin to cooperate with sin — cut that cooperation off at the root. Because sin corrupts strength just as quickly as weakness.

Why Jesus uses “right” instead of “left”

Because the left was the non-dominant side.

Removing the “left” eye or hand would imply:

- removing something weaker
- removing something less essential
- making a sacrifice that doesn’t cost much

But Jesus is describing something far more costly:

Removing the part of your inner life you actually depend on.

- Your preferred imagination
- Your favored way of seeing
- Your natural inclinations
- Your strongest impulses
- The part you think is “just who I am”

This is the part that must be surrendered if it leads to the inward sin.

Since Jesus is addressing the heart, not the flesh, the ‘cutting off’ must also be internal. So what exactly inside us is He calling us to surrender?

You cannot cut out sinful desire by force — you can only starve it by shifting the love of the heart.

This is why Jesus uses hyperbolic bodily amputation as the metaphor:

- You cannot cut out the heart literally.

- You cannot cut off desire physically.
- You cannot remove the will by violence against yourself.

So what is He actually teaching?

He is teaching how real inner transformation works.

The First Step

What is actually causing the sin?

We cut off sinful desire by breaking our agreement

Lust, coveting, sinful imagination — all of them survive by our agreement.

The “member” Jesus refers to is:

- the part of the heart that agrees with the fantasy,
- welcomes the desire,
- delights in imagining it,
- rehearses the act in the secret inward theater.

To cut it off means:

You withdraw the “yes.”

Not the desire — the consent.

Desire may arise involuntarily.

But inward agreement is voluntary.

Cutting off means:

- refusing to welcome the thought,
- refusing to fantasize,
- refusing to give the desire a home,
- refusing to let imagination nurse it into life.

This is the actual “surgery” Jesus is describing.

We have to make the decision that we no longer agree with our lust.

Some people get there and then try on their own will power to change their behaviour.

You cannot destroy sin by:

- white-knuckling,
- shaming yourself,
- hating yourself,
- suppressing feelings,
- punishing your flesh.

Those methods:

- make sin stronger,

- deepen shame,
- reinforce the ego,
- split the self.

Why? Because man does not have the power to cut out his own sinful desire. Only God can perform this kind of heart-surgery. We do not have the power alone to overcome lust when it has rooted in our heart. Neither can a broken mind heal a broken mind.

Because inward sin changes the self even when nothing outward happens

This is vital:

****The outward act corrupts the body.**

The inward desire corrupts the identity.**

Inward lust:

- trains the mind to objectify
- erodes the capacity for genuine love
- reshapes the heart around self-centered desire
- divorces the will from purity
- habituates coveting
- alters one's relational posture

The inner life shapes the whole person. To God: The inward desire is the truth of the person - because it is what we have chosen - and it has taken us into darkness where we cannot see.

This is important - Once we understand this was made by agreement, and we now desire to break that agreement knowing we cannot heal it alone, we have to then make the decision to ask God to heal us.

We THEN begin to see that the sinful desire is NOT actually us. We are the ones who no longer agree, we are the ones who try hard to overcome but can't. We are the ones who want to be healed.

So we See that the sinful desire is not us, but something in us.

Paul says the same:

"It is no longer I who do it, but sin living in me."

(Rom. 7:17)

I have known scores of men who have tried to overcome and cannot. They may have taken the first step of breaking the agreement, but they are still trying to play God with their own power. Remember, we were the ones

weak enough to be deceived and lured in by the LIE of the desire - so how can we believe we have the intelligence, power or strength to be greater than our deceiver?

Satan is much faster, stronger, without earthly limits and of an intelligence we cannot even conceive of. We must have God's help.

And God is always willing to help!

GOD is Gentleman - He does not LUST after us - but desires to share the inheritance of His Kingdom with us, as CO-Heirs... to be our family and brother and God. But ONLY if we choose it. He does not covet us, but shows us pure and true and moral desire to be with us and share with us all of life.

And God is greater than the deceiver and will always heal our heart if we surrender that part of our heart to Him and honestly desire for Him to do so.

12 verses of God doing the work for us.

1. Ezekiel 36:26–27

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes...”

2. Psalm 51:10

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.”
David doesn't say “help me clean my heart.”
He says “create” — because he knows he cannot do it.

3. Ezekiel 11:19–20

“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh...”

4. Deuteronomy 30:6

“The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart...”

5. God Writes His Law inside, not outside

Jeremiah 31:33

“I will put My law in their minds,
and write it on their hearts.”

He rewires desire itself.

6. Acts 15:9

“...purifying their hearts by faith.”

Purity is supernatural.

It comes through faith, not willpower.

7. Philippians 2:13

“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do
for His good pleasure.”

He changes both:

- the desire (to will)
- the ability (to do)

8. Ephesians 3:16

“...to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...”

The Spirit gives power for inner obedience.

9. Hosea 14:4

“I will heal their backsliding;

I will love them freely...”

He heals the tendency to wander — the inner bent.

10. Proverbs 3:3

“Write them on the tablet of your heart...”

God Writes Mercy and Truth on the Heart

11. Jeremiah 17:10

“I, the Lord, search the heart...”

He searches in order to transform.

12. Ezekiel 36:25

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean...”

An inner cleansing only He can perform.

Inward lust violates the Divine Order even if no one is harmed
Sin doesn't become sin because someone gets hurt.
Sin is sin because it violates Love, Truth, and Divine Order.