

04 – A HIGHER STANDARD

- ✓ In the OT, murder was an Act. In the NT, you're guilty when it's in your heart to do it. (Notice, I didn't say you're guilty if the thought comes. Some have said, "If you think it, you're guilty." So not true!)

Learning About Thoughts

- ✓ Not every thought that comes to you is YOUR thought! Said Another Way: Not every thought in your mind originated with you. Thoughts can come from a LOT of outside sources. Thoughts come through:
 1. Observation – (In other words, they come because of what you see). You're walking down the street, and you pass a bakery. In the window, you see a dozen fresh pies. And, the thought comes, "Gee, I'd like a piece of pie!" Now, why did that thought come? Because of what you saw! (You're only *thinking* of pie because you *saw* a pie! If you were passing a car dealership, you wouldn't be thinking about pie at all!) Some thoughts come, simply because of what you see.
 2. Association – You're walking in the mall, hand-in-hand with your wife, enjoying each other's company. Suddenly, a song plays over the loudspeaker. It just happens to be the song that you and a previous girlfriend called "your song"! So, you're walking with your wife – holding her hand – but you're thinking of your old girlfriend. Why are you doing that? An association took you there! (That's involuntary. You didn't *choose* to think on that! The thought came because there was an association.)
 3. The Devil Plants Thoughts – That's one of his chief methods of operation: He puts a thought in your mind, then sees what you'll do with it. Here's What You Need to Understand: The initial thought isn't a sin. It's a temptation to sin. It comes down to this: What are you going to do with that thought?
- ✓ Example: It's a hot summer day. You're out walking, and you notice an attractive person who's not dressed modestly. And an impure

thought comes. At that point, you have two choices. You can cast down that thought & look away. (If you do that, you haven't sinned.) Or you can pick up that thought and begin to lust in your heart. It only becomes sin if you take the bait and start lusting. Look again at Jesus' words.

Matt. 5:28 – "But, I tell you, if anyone looks at a woman in such a way as to deliberately awaken within himself, the forbidden desire for her ..."

Wuest – "Everyone who is looking at a woman, in order to indulge his sexual passion for her ..."

- ✓ Both of those translations present you as a willing participant! You're not guilty of sin when the first thought comes. It's when you *entertain* the thought and move over into willing participation, that it becomes sin.

Two Difficult Verses:

Matthew 5:29-30 – "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you ... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you ..."

- ✓ Is Jesus speaking literally here? Does He *really* want me to grab an axe and strike off my hand? Certainly not. The Bible *does* mention self-mutilation, but always in a negative light. (The prophets of Baal, the Gaderene demoniac, etc.) Conversely, we're told to *honor* our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. So, this can only be symbolic language. (So, what does Jesus mean here?)
- ✓ "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you ..."
- ✓ All the way through the Sermon on the Mt., the eye stands for the mind. ("If your right eye offends you" ... If you're "looking to lust", and sinning in the thought realm, "pluck it out"! Not the eye, the thought. Pluck out that thought and cast it down! 2 Cor. 10:5)
- ✓ "And, if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off ..." If it's gone past just thinking about it, and you're actually sinning with your

hands / **actions**, “cut it off”. (Not the hand! Cut off the action!)

- ✓ Notice How Jesus Says to Deal With Sin – “Cut it off! Stop it!” Listen: Weaning yourself off sin isn’t Scriptural. “I’m gonna try to CUT BACK on fornication!” No, Jesus said, “Cut it out of your life”. Will that hurt? Yes. But it’s better than living with the consequences.

Sins of the Tongue:

Matthew 5:33-35 – “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, ‘You must not break your oaths, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.’ But I tell you, **when you make a promise, don’t try to make it stronger with an oath ...**”

- ✓ That’s what an oath does! It props up your statement! You know your word isn’t good enough by itself, so you borrow the strength of something else, and you bring it in to co-sign your statement. (“I’m telling the truth. Honest, I swear by _____.”)

*“Don’t swear by heaven, because it’s God’s Throne. Or by the earth, because it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. Simply say yes or no. **When you mean ‘yes’, say ‘yes’. When you mean ‘no’, say ‘no’.**” (v. 34-37 – Barclay’s Translation)*

- ✓ In the OT, it was enough if you just kept your oaths. In the NT, you should have enough integrity to not need an oath.

A Higher Standard

- ✓ Sometimes people say, “Man, I’m SO glad we’re not under the Law! I’m glad we’re under Grace!” I’m glad too. But that doesn’t mean God lowered His standard. (Did you notice, in every case, the standard didn’t go *down*, it went *up*?)

OT – I couldn’t kill you. **NT** – I can’t hate you. I’m told to love you. (Mt. 5:43; 1 Pet. 3:19.) That standard didn’t just go “up”. It went through the ozone!

OT – I couldn’t sleep around. **NT** – I’m not allowed to *look* lustfully. (1 Tim. 5:2)

OT – I’m told to keep my word, if I took an oath. **NT** – My word should always be good, even *without* an oath.

Why Did the Standard Go Up?

- ✓ You have more resources to “obey with” than they did in the OT. You have a new nature, a Helper, power (Acts 1:8), God’s love (Ro. 5:5), His Word, His Name, the Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit, etc.

Retaliation: Matt. 5:38

- ✓ We need to be careful how we interpret this. a.) It’s not saying that you can never stand up for yourself. (Paul used the laws of the land to protect himself – Acts 22:25.) b.) It’s not saying that you can’t protect yourself from real danger. (A slap on the cheek was an insult. It only bruised your ego. There was no real danger.)

Romans 12:19-20 – “Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it. Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be **heaping coals of fire on his head.**”

- ✓ “Woo Hoo! All right, God!!!! I couldn’t have said it better myself. Let’s burn his brains out!” (If your fire went out on one of those cold, Middle Eastern nights, you were in trouble. So, what you’d do is you’d put a special container on your head, and you go from camp to camp, looking for some kind soul who would heap coals from *his* fire on *your* head, so you could go back and get your fire going again. If someone did that for you, they were your friend for life.)

v. 43 – “You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy; But I say unto you, Love your enemies ... If you only love those who love you, what reward will you have? Even the tax collectors do the same ... **But you are called to something higher:** Be perfect (**mature**), as your Father in heaven is perfect (mature).”