

Devotions with Matt

May 16, 2020

READING THE INSTRUCTIONS

Not too long ago we bought a cabinet from IKEA. It came in a box with all the parts for putting it together. You have probably had the same experience. It is a bit overwhelming at first. There are bags and bags of different pegs and screws and braces. Since I was in construction some time ago, I figured, although it looked daunting, I could do it out without reading the instructions. You, again, may have had that same experience. I set the instructions aside and started forming the outline of the cabinet with its pieces. I started putting the pegs in what seemed like the right places and the screws where they would seem to make the cabinet the strongest. Just about when it was all finished I noticed a bag of parts off to the side that I hadn't noticed before. As soon as I saw them, I realized I had missed a step way back in the beginning. I had to pull it all apart to install those foundational pieces. I did it with grumbling and murmuring and wished I had read the instructions.

That's the thing about the Bible. We often look at it like it as a book of dos and don'ts. We think God gives us a list of things that if we do them He will be angry with us. He also, we think, gives us a list that we are to do and, when we do, He then will be happy with us. We look at the list of regulations and dangers He spells out for us in terms of morality. It becomes morality for morality's sake. But the more we truly dive into the Bible, God's Word to us, we see that morality isn't just a list of dos and don'ts, nor is it just for morality's sake. Living in God's moral standards are foundational to our lives and the way we build relationships with the people and world around us.

We are still in the deep end of the pool. Jesus continues in The Sermon on the Mount with The Seventh Commandment about not committing adultery. "You have heard that it was said", he begins, "Do not commit adultery." He then takes us deeper. So deep we wonder if what He is saying is even possible. "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." We can look at adultery and agree it is bad, but missing the instructions from God, we can build our lives on the premise that the physical act of it is wrong, but the interior heart condition in regards to it is not. We're not hurting anyone, we surmise. This is the part that we have been missing and our lives have been on shaky ground without it.

But, this is not morality for morality's sake. This is something huge in the preservation of God's building blocks of society: the sanctity of marriage. "What God has brought together, let no one separate", He says. The breakdown of a marriage is a breakdown of the family. The breakdown of the family is a breakdown in society. Some of our greatest problems today are caused by the breakdown of marriage and the family unit.

Sex is good. God created it. He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. That doesn't happen without the gift of sex. But that gift is to be used in the way the Giver intended it to be used: in the confines of marriage between one man and one woman. When we try to short circuit His intent, disregard the instruction manual if you will, it becomes problematic for all of us. Even lusting after another short-circuits God's will for us in that when we do, we are denigrating the one we lust after in that they become something to please us, rather than someone who has great value and is made in the image of God.



When we lust after another's wife, or even a woman lusting at someone's husband, in our hearts we are saying our desire is more important than God's Will and the institution of marriage. Even though the act is not yet committed, it is still very harmful. This is a stretch you may say, but we are told in the book of James, "(that) each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Unchecked lust in our hearts will lead to the act of adultery. Jesus tells us to cut off our hand and gouge out our eyes if they lead us into sin. He is not advocating self mutilation, rather He is pointing out the gravity of an unchecked heart condition.

So our lives are built, but now Jesus says we are missing something. He takes adultery out of the physical act alone and puts it in the spiritual realm. Lust is a battle. Do we just continue in our lives the way we are, or do we take the missing pieces God now gives us and put them to good use? Only Jesus can heal our broken hearts and can restore them to their original and proper condition. Without Him we will continue to lust. God created sex for us. He loves us and wants the best for us. He didn't send us the instructions to keep us from having fun, He sent them so we would not destroy our lives, and others, and that we could get the maximum enjoyment out of His gift. The instructions are not morality for morality's sake; they are about life and the way we were created to live.

Let's read His instructions to us before we go any further.

But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

James 1:14-15

In Christ,

Matt