SECOND ANTITHESIS

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has in his heart already committed adultery with her. But if your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members perish than that your whole body be thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members should perish than that your whole body depart into Gehenna.
Matthew 5:27-30

The second antithesis is again a quote from one of the Ten Commandments,

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.
Exodus 20:13-14

You shall not murder. And you shall not commit adultery.
Deuteronomy 5:17-18

Jesus maintains the order given above by citing *murder* before *adultery.* Make no mistake. Jesus is not attempting to expound or comment on the Commandments. Rather he is giving us a interpretation that cuts through to the inner meaning of the law.

What also can be noticed is that the formula for the right eye and the right hand and the following admonition in each case is verbatim including the climax of Gehenna.

Matthew (or Jesus) uses this formula on another occasion in Matthew, but that time in a warning to the one who brings temptation which might cause others to sin.

Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.
Matthew 18:7-9

The structure of the second antithesis is similar to the first.

1) a contrast between the prohibition of the external deed and Jesus' emphasis on the thoughts of the inner person *in his heart).*
2) wording that illustrates the gravity of the offending thoughts.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has in his heart has already committed adultery with her."
Matthew 5:27-28

"You have heard that it was said." – is identical in form to v.21 save for the omission of *"to the ancients,"* which should be assumed here.

Jesus offers no additional penalty for adultery such as death which provision was also found within the law.

If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So shall you purge evil from Israel.
Deuteronomy 22:22

If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death.
Leviticus 20:10

The important distinction is that Jesus gives his interpretation of the commandment in light of the perfection of the Kingdom.

The sin of adultery, like other sins, finds its roots in a person's inner thoughts.

Thus, to look deliberately at a woman lustfully, i.e., desiring or imagining a sexual relationship with her, is to commit adultery in one's heart and thus to violate the deepest intention of the law as now revealed by Jesus.
Hagner – Matthew, page 129

This idea of sinning within the heart is already contained in the Ten commandments. Its language is found within the prohibition of coveting.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.
Exodus 20:17

Thoughts of transgression are worse than transgression itself, and your mnemonic (prompt or pattern) is the order of meat. The smell of roasting meat is more appetizing than actually eating the meat.
Yoma 29a (3rd to 6th Century AD.)

Though the Old Testament and Jewish contexts use *wife of another*, the idea Jesus implies here could be broadened to include any woman. The evidence for this is that if Jesus desired to keep within the Old Testament boundaries, he could have repeated the commandment verbatim and used the language of *"your neighbor's wife."*

What can be gleaned from the idea here regarding the inner thoughts of a person and their being the cause of temptation toward another to sin via Matthew 18:7-9 above, is that rather than one just lusting after another, one also causes another to lust.

The importance of the eyes in lusting is captured in a phrase used in 2 Peter.

> *They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained for greed. Accursed children.*
> *2 Peter 2:14*

> *For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.*
> *1 John 2:16*

> *But if your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members perish than that your whole body be thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is better for you that one of your members should perish than that your whole body depart into Gehenna.*
> *Matthew 5:29-30*

The eye and the idea of *"everyone who looks"* in the preceding verse coincides with the action found in this verse, *"But if your right eye causes you to stumble", pluck it out.*

The meaning here concerns the *eye* as the cause for stumbling.

In the tradition this saying was linked with one concerning the hand under the exact structure, therefore, it is likely that this is why Matthew included it here.

The specification of the *"right hand"* or *"right eye"* is most likely meant to indicate that which is preferred or more skilled and, therefore, more valuable. After all, the left eye can lust just as easily.

The removal of the eye or hand is hyperbole. The right eye is to be plucked out and the right hand cut off if they are a cause for stumbling. The reason given in both cases is verbatim: *it is better for one member of the body to perish than for the whole to suffer damnation.*

Gehenna is of course the symbolic illustration for the torment of eternal damnation.

The focus of these admonitions is clear, and one doesn't need to press for a literal understanding of the words.

Jesus considers it important to obey God's standard of righteousness and radical action should be taken to avoid the cause of temptation.

Remember, Jesus is primarily speaking to the disciples here and teaching them God's standard. Thus, the disciple of the Kingdom must take drastic measures.

Understand that the removing of one's eye or the cutting off of one's hand will not by necessity eliminate the problem within the person.

The true culprit lies not with the eye or with the hand, but deep inside the inner person, within their heart.

> *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.*
> *Jeremiah 17:9-10*

To offer a summary of the first two antitheses, Jesus assumes a high authority in relation to the law.

He refers to God's deliverance at Sinai: *"You have heard it was said to the ancients."* But then he says, *"But I say to you."* With this statement, Jesus places himself in the place of God.

God had spoken before but through Jesus, God speaks his final word.

In the first antithesis regarding anger, Jesus is not saying that anger is inherently wrong. Scripture tells us God gets angry and occasionally the Bible refers to justified human anger.

Like other emotions, anger motivates action, and indignation agasint evil impels us to oppose it.

Anger can be motivated by a sense of justice and motivate us to combat injustice and evil.

Jesus doesn't actually command us not to get angry, but rather simply describes what anger can lead to. He describes the mere emotion of anger and also anger expressed in words of insults. Jesus then steers us to avoid the consequences that come when anger takes root and to properly use anger as a motivation for Godly actions that actually combat injustice and evil.

In the same way, sexual attraction isn't sin. Jesus doesn't say if you look at a woman with lust, but rather, *"if you look at a woman with the purpose of lusting,"* that is, if your intention is to look upon someone with an intent to arouse yourself and cultivate sexual desire, this is the sin.

Gazing at a woman other than your wife to arouse sexual desire is sin.

Jesus is talking about sexual desire that we nurture in our hearts so that we can begin to act on it.

Here, Jesus again deepens the intent of the Old Testament commandment by interpreting it to include what occurs in the heart prior to and as the foundation of the external act.

He thus once again shifts the attention from the external act to the inner thought. There in the inner person lies the true problem and the initial guilt.

The discipleship of the Kingdom is a serious matter that requires true and unreserved, absolute, commitment. Disciples are called to a standard of conduct that include even the realm of their thinking. *"Taking every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5)*