***No 4 Our wandering eyes Matthew 5:27 to 30***

Jesus is giving his disciples teaching that will help them understand their place in his kingdom and in their world. But this feels very drastic. Gouging out eyes and cutting off hands sounds a bit extreme. Is this really what Jesus wants us to do if we are guilty. At one level it is hard to believe that many of us are totally guiltless in offences committed by hands or eyes so does this mean that we all end up unable to see or hold anything?

Jesus quotes the 7th commandment. Adultery in the Old Testament involved sexual intercourse with mutual consent between a man, married or unmarried, and the wife of another man. The term and the penalty (death) applied equally to both the man and the woman. A betrothed woman was counted in this context (Deut 22:23 to 24). Adultery was considered one of the most serious offences because it broke the relationship that was a reflection of God and his people. Adultery was often used to describe the way in which the people of Israel went after gods other than Yahweh.

1. Is adultery taken that seriously in our world today?

What effect do present values have on the way we see marriage today?

The Old Testament strongly denounces all extramarital sexual relationships apparently condemning the male offender more strongly than the female. Jesus’ pronouncement reaffirms the OT commitment to the unity of the marriage bond and takes it to its deepest meaning. We are surrounded by images of beauty (male and female) in today’s culture.

1. Is it asking too much for us never to look at someone and think (in your heart) that they are attractive?

Is ‘admiring beauty’ alright or is it a first dangerous step?

How do we deal with the sexual imagery that is so much part of our media? (if you don’t believe this take a look at the TV commercials)

For a man to look lustfully at another woman (or vice versa) breaks the bond of oneness that a man has with his wife. Jesus re-defines adultery as mentally engaging in an act of unfaithfulness.

1. How do we stop that happening?

There are so many products on the market today to make ourselves more attractive – are there any limits here for Christians?

Do we all have a responsibility to reduce the possibility of being attractive to another person?

Jesus illustrates the seriousness of lust through two graphic examples. If your eye is wandering, gouge it out – if your right-hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Most people in Jesus’ time were right-handed so the right side often stood for the more powerful or important side. The eye is the source of initial temptation and the hand is the physical means of the act. With one of each removed the tempted one now has single-eyed and single-handed devotion to their spouse.

1. What should the church be doing or teaching to encourage godly marriages?

What can we do to support one another in developing healthy but lust-less relationships?

What are the boundaries?

Early in church history people such as Origen of Alexandria wrongly took these saying literally. Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation but, through dramatic figures of speech, indicates the kind of rigorous self-discipline that committed disciples will display.

1. The degree of sexual imagery on our TV screens is well known.

Should we sometimes turn the TV off?

If a book has explicit sexual content, should we continue to read it?

This section is about good wholesome God-centred relationships. All of us need such things.

1. In our prayer time let’s ask God to enable all of us to develop such relationships in our community.