

Adultery Defined

Question:

When giving the “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus said, “If a man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). What did Jesus mean by these words and why was it necessary for Him to redefine the meaning of adultery?

Our Answer:

With this definition, Jesus was contrasting the traditional view concerning adultery as expressed in the law: “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18), with God’s genuine intent when giving the law. Unfortunately, the Jews at that time understood the keeping of this commandment to mean simply refraining from sexual intercourse with someone other than a spouse. However, Jesus was pointing out that God’s law was spiritual, and obedience could only be achieved by honoring this command in both mind and body. If the intent of the heart is compromised, then so is God’s law.