The combination of chocolate with peanut butter has to be one of the all-time greatest achievements in human history. No one knows for sure who was the first to do it. Much like fire, the wheel, and the American cheeseburger, the chocolate and peanut butter combination is one of those incredible inventions whose origin has been lost to the mists of time. A superficial search of the internet suggests the credit goes to a former dairy farmer by the name of Harry Burnett Reese, who, in 1928, invented what we now know as the Reese’s peanut butter cup.

If this is true, then Mr. Reese is my hero. I believe what Mr. Reese has created is happiness coated with a layer of joy, of which I am a big fan. If there are Reese’s peanut butter cups in the house, I will find them and I will eat them. I have been known to steal them from my children’s trick-or-treat buckets, Christmas stockings, and Easter baskets. Just one peanut butter cup is a delightful treat. But who am I kidding, I never eat just one. I eat until they are all gone. I have convinced myself that the family bag is really a single serving size. It’s like I can’t help it! Sometimes I just crave chocolate and peanut butter.

I know it’s not good for me. If my craving for chocolate and peanut butter goes uncontrolled it could easily lead to high blood pressure and cholesterol, diabetes, and finally heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in America today. Even more than lung cancer and cirrhosis of the Liver. My little craving for chocolate and peanut butter, if not controlled, will destroy my body.

As sobering a thought as that may be, today as we continue our examination of Jesus’ sermon on the mount, as it is recorded in Matthew 5:21-37, we learn there are some cravings that can destroy more than just your body. There are some cravings that can destroy your soul. Today Jesus calls upon His followers to exercise self-control in the face of such cravings.

Last week Jesus commanded His disciples to get involved in the lives of other people with the gospel. His command was contrary to the culture the Pharisees had cultivated among the people. The Pharisees weren’t as concerned with others as they were themselves. The Pharisees’ main concern was with their own righteousness, or at least their idea of what it meant to be righteous. As I said last week, the Pharisees had watered down God’s word, they modified it so that righteousness was more easily attained. For example, the Pharisees thought they had obeyed God’s command to not murder as long as they didn’t physically and unjustly take the life of another. Likewise, they thought they had obeyed God’s command to not commit adultery as long as they did not have relations with a married woman.

Now, to narrow the pool of married women, they made it increasingly easy to get a divorce. Marriage to them was a temporary arrangement that could be ended for almost any reason, like say irreconcilable differences. All that mattered to them was the certificate of divorce. As long as you had a legal document declaring the marriage ended you were, in their eyes, no longer a married woman. And so technically any relations with such a woman would not be, again, in their eyes, adultery. Promises like, ‘till death do us part’, didn’t mean as much to the Pharisees. They had concocted an elaborate system of oaths. To them, some oaths were not as binding as others. An oath sworn in the name of the temple was not as binding as an oath sworn to heaven. Really only an oath sworn to God was binding and even then there might be a way out of it under the right circumstances.

With these alterations, modifications to God’s Word, the Pharisees were able to attain what they thought and taught to be righteousness. Last week, the last thing Jesus said to His disciples was, “20 I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus says to His disciples, He says to you, and to me, “21 You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. The Pharisees attained their righteousness by focusing on the word “murder”. But the righteousness that God requires surpasses “murder”. And so Jesus instructs us to focus on the word “anger.” It is an interesting word that means “lavish swelling of sap and vigor,” “thrusting and up-surgering”. It is used to describe the churning waters of the sea.

Our culture believes anger to be a natural result of our evolutionary process. They see it as a primordial craving of our animalistic past. They say, ‘we cannot help but to become angry, it’s in our nature’. And to an extent I would agree. Not with all the evolutionary fiction but to the extent that anger is in our nature, specifically our sinful nature. Our sinful nature craves revenge. It craves pain and suffering from those who have hurt us, wronged us, opposed us.

But Jesus tells us, this craving must be controlled. Not only for the protection and benefit of the recipient of your anger but also for you. If left uncontrolled this craving can destroy your soul. 1 John 3:15 explains what Jesus is saying. “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”

Jesus continues, “27 You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Again the Pharisees attained their righteousness by focusing on the word “adultery”. But the righteousness that God requires surpasses “adultery”. And so Jesus focuses our attention on the word “lust”. Now, I don’t believe I have ever treated these two sins together. Even though they are commandments five and six on God’s list, I still have always separated them as their own unique expressions of sin. But when you boil them down to the carnal level, as Jesus does here, you discover that hate and lust are not all that
different. The Greek word for hate “ὀργή” sounds a lot like our English word orgy and the Greek word for lust “ἐμθυμέω” originally described a violent movement, in fact the root word is translated as “wrath”.

Our culture reconciles this connection by saying lust, like anger is a natural craving. They say, “I can’t help it if desires are aroused in my heart at the sight of a person of the opposite sex. Such feelings are caused by hormones, they are natural.” That may be true, but it doesn’t make it right.

Sin has perverted the function of our hormones and the feelings of our hearts. Desires intended for the spouse are now extended to anyone who catches our eye. Jesus tells us this craving must also be controlled or it will destroy your soul. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 Saint Paul tells us, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God.”

Thinking about godly desires for the opposite sex, Jesus says, “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress.” First allow me to explain the clunkiness of our English translation here. You see we don’t have an expression that explains what the man has done to the woman when he divorces her and so we say “he causes her to become an adulteress.” A better translation, though poor English, would be “he has adulterated her”. She does not share the guilt of his sin. The fault is his. Anyway, the point Jesus is making is, as Matthew says in 19:6, “what God has joined together, let man not separate.” It’s true. It is. It doesn’t sound like Jesus believes in things like “irreconcilable differences”. The Pharisee thought they attained righteousness in such a way but Jesus says our righteousness must surpass irreconcilable differences.

Our culture encourages us to treat our spouse like an I-Phone. If you can get your hands on a newer model, go for it! They say it’s not natural for one man and one woman to be yoked together forever. People change, feelings change, needs change. They say, It is natural for us to crave variety and so why shouldn’t we treat the person we are married to like a flavor of the month?

But Jesus tells us this craving, must be controlled. Not only to spare your spouse and your children of the stigma of being “adultered”, but also for you. If left uncontrolled this craving can destroy your soul. In Malachi 2:16, the LORD God of Israel says, “I hate divorce.”

Thinking of keeping your commitments, Jesus says, “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all… The Pharisees attained their righteousness by finding loopholes in their agreements. But the righteousness that God requires surpasses loopholes. And so Jesus speaks of honesty and integrity that comes from a history of doing what you said you were going to do instead of promising to do something, but not doing it.

Agreements between parties is necessary to the peaceful functioning of a society. But an agreement is only as strong as the people who make it. The reason every third commercial on your television is about a law firm is because our culture is full of loopholes in their agreements. But the righteousness that God requires surpasses loopholes. And so Jesus speaks of honesty and integrity that comes from a history of doing what you said you were going to do instead of promising to do something, but not doing it.

What do we do? I’ll tell you what you do. When you come to the realization that you have failed to control your cravings and so have failed to attain the righteousness God requires to enter the kingdom of heaven, this is what you do, you look at the preacher. Oh, not me! I have no more self-control than any of you. I have given in to as many cravings as you have, if not more. Don’t look at this preacher. Look at the one who preached this sermon on the mount. Look at Jesus. In 1 Peter 2:22 Saint Peter describes Him with these words, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.” Look at Jesus and see one who had enough self-control to resist every craving that sought to destroy His soul. Look at Jesus and listen to the words of Saint Paul from 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Look at Jesus and realize that by faith in Him as your Savior your righteousness does surpass that of the Pharisees. Because of Jesus your sinful cravings will never destroy your soul. Because of Jesus you will certainly enter the kingdom of Heaven.

You don’t need self-control to make you righteous enough to get into heaven. Jesus has already made you righteous enough for that. But out of gratitude for the righteousness Jesus gives you, I encourage you to do everything you can control every craving that seeks to destroy your soul. Who knows, maybe it will also motivate you to control the cravings that seek to destroy your body as well.
May God motivate you by His grace and equip you through His Word to give Him thanks and praise by controlling all your cravings! Amen