

Sermon 16, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery, Matthew 5:27-30

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Manuscript

We continue this morning to talk about the necessity of our righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus described this as His thesis, and He gives six examples of it in Matthew 5. We looked last week at the first example — anger is against the law just as murder is against the law. Today we come to the second example, and we will see that lustful thoughts are just as damning as adulterous actions. Thinking lustfully and looking lustfully is as much a sin as actually consummating an adulterous deed. What the law requires is a pure heart, and any kind of radical action necessary to get there. We'll see the law, Jesus' "yes, and" to the law, and then some of the implications of the radical purity that God's law commands.

I. The Law: Don't Commit Adultery, v. 27

This is the law: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Pretty straightforward, right? In Hebrew, it's only two words. "No adultery." But implication in the way Jesus quotes it, by analogy with the Pharisees' interpretation of the command about murder, is that the Pharisees effectively said "But anything else is okay!" Go ahead and lust; go ahead and fornicate; go ahead and engage in heavy petting and erotic literature and dancing. Those aren't adultery! Adultery, of course, is literally

the act of consummating a sexual relationship with someone who is married. Either one of the parties to the adultery can be married to someone else, or both can be. Regardless, technically, this is the only thing that's adultery. So if you're single, the idea is, do whatever you want! Just leave married people alone. If you're married, the rule is "no going all the way," but otherwise, you can do as you please. Again, this interpretation of the law is not quite "If it feels good, do it," but it tends rapidly in that direction!

So here's the law, as expounded by the scribes and Pharisees: if you're married, don't mess around. If you're single, don't mess with married people.

II. Jesus' "Yes, And:" Don't Lust; Take Radical Action Against Lust!, vv. 28-30

Jesus says, effectively, "Yes. Don't commit adultery. *And*, don't even lust in your heart. In fact, you must take radical action against lust if you want to be in conformity to what the law requires!"

A. Lust Is Heart Adultery, v. 28

Thus, Jesus adds that any lustful look is heart adultery. Anytime you look at another person as a sex object, and not a person; anytime you titillate your fancy with some sort of sexual thought, desire, image, or urge, you are breaking the law against adultery. You see, the commandment doesn't just forbid the consummation of a sexual act between two people at least one of whom is married to someone else. No; it forbids any motion of the heart toward that kind of sin. It's not only a sin to do it; it's a sin to want to do it. It's a sin to think about doing it in any way that finds it attractive or desirable or fun.

I don't have to define lust further than this. You all know what it is. Everyone over a certain age has done it, read about it, seen it on TV.

We all know that adultery is wicked. To betray your spouse, to devastate your children, to break your most solemn promise to the person you said you loved better than anyone in the whole world — this is a very wicked thing to do.

But taking a second glance at that poster, that ad at the bottom of the article you just read online, that girl in Walmart, that item in your mother's shopping history on Amazon — how could that be wrong? Well, Jesus says it is. Jesus, interpreting God's law with authority, says that it is morally wrong to look with lust. He says that it must never be done. He says that it is wrong just like full-blown adultery is wrong.

Why is this? Because Christianity focuses on the heart. God looks at the heart. The source of sin is the heart. Sin is logically prior to sins; you are wicked before you do wicked things. In fact, you do wicked things because you're wicked. Heart adultery is a sin committed with the most sinful thing in your body — not your genitals, but your heart.

Now, you may be thinking, "I might as well be hung for a sheep as hung for a lamb. If I'm guilty of heart adultery because I enjoyed that dirty picture, I guess I might as well do it more; I might as well have an affair; I might as well buy the first five seasons of *Game of Thrones* on DVD." That's totally wrong. Jesus is not saying that all sins are equally wicked; He's saying that they are all sin, and that any sin is infinitely bad because it's a sin against an infinitely

good God. He's saying that you must stop classifying sins according to minor and major, and then thinking, "Well, I stayed away from all the majors, so I'm good to go." No! Jesus is saying that minor sins can damn you too. If you're really a Christian, you must be concerned to avoid every sin, no matter how small, because your life is dedicated to Jesus Christ.

You see, Pharisaical righteousness proceeds by avoiding major sins. (Yes, Jesus said they neglected the weightier matters of the law. That's because they stuck to the letter and avoided the Spirit — a tactic which also allowed them to neglect justice, mercy, and faithfulness. But the OT doesn't say, in so many words, "Be just, merciful, and faithful.") For purposes of the 10 commandments, they didn't actually kill people (other than Jesus and Stephen). They didn't actually sleep around. They didn't actually steal camels and commit title fraud on houses. They avoided major sins, and they thought that was enough. But Jesus comes and says, "No, the morality of the Kingdom of Heaven requires that you avoid little sins too! In fact, it requires that you avoid the smallest sins because your heart is completely pure." Jesus requires that we take radical action against even the smallest sin of lust. That's why He goes on to say that any sacrifice is better than breaking God's law.

B. Any Sacrifice Is Better than Breaking God's Law, vv. 29-30

Some of the commentators tie themselves in knots over these verses. The right eye must mean a friend, or a counselor, they say. But the meaning is really quite clear: even the tiniest sin is so bad that you ought to give up anything rather than continue to commit that sin.

1. You Should Poke Out Your Eye Rather than Lust, v. 29

So here's Jesus' instructions in a particular hypothetical case. Your right eye offends you. That is, it causes you to stumble. It scandalizes you, to use the English derivative from the Greek root here. What do you do? When your eye is the occasion of you committing the sin of lusting after someone, Jesus says you ought to pop it out with your thumb, just like this, and then throw it away. Toss it out the window. Flush it down the toilet.

Now, this is where He gets practical. Has anyone in this room ever been led into the sin of lust by his right eye? If you say no, you're lying. And yet everyone in this room has two eyes. Why is that? Are we all a bunch of disobedient hypocrites? In a word, yes. We are disobedient saints. But I don't think we're hypocrites, and I don't think Jesus is really telling us to pop out our eyeballs and throw them away. Why not? Because the eye is not the problem. Where does sin come from? The heart. What commits the sin? You do. The whole person does. Sin is not something that can be localized in a particular body part. No. Christ is saying hypothetically, if it were possible that sin could be localized, that part needs to go. But sin is the act of a person, not of a body part. Hands don't kill people; people kill people. And people commit every other sin too. The part that sins needs to die, Jesus says.

a) Losing an Eye Is Comparatively Good, v. 29b

In fact, it is profitable for you, or better for you, for one of your members to perish. Does anyone here want to lose an eye? Of course not. Yet compared to the alternative, losing an eye is a good

thing. Jesus is using the eye here to talk about what's precious to you, what you love, what you really really don't want to give up. That thing, whatever it is, has to go if it causes you to sin.

b) Failure to Control Your Eyes Will Send You to Hell, v. 29c

Why? Because even a single lustful look can send you to hell. You are better off one-eyed and lust-free than you are to have both eyes to go into hell with. The point, once again, is that any sin is a sin worthy of damnation. As long as you're classifying sins by "major" and "minor" rather than as simply "sin," you're falling into Pharisaical thinking. Your righteousness will never exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if you think in those terms.

Do you know what Hell is? It is a place of eternal torment. It is a place where you scream in overpowering agony for centuries, for millennia, forever and ever and ever. It is a place where you are totally hopeless and you know, totally in pain and you know it, totally consumed with pain and anger and hatred and isolation forever and ever, collapsing in on yourself like a black hole. That's what Hell is like. And even a single lustful look, undealt with, will take you there. That's why it's better to get rid of your eye than to lust.

2. You Should Cut off Your Hand Rather than Lust, v. 30

You all might remember the case of Aron Ralston, trapped by a falling boulder while hiking alone in Utah back in 2003. After five days lying pinned by the boulder, unable to free himself, he realized that he could cut off his hand and escape. He had used his knife the day before to carve his name and death date into the stone, and it was really dull — but with it he managed to cut off his hand, rappel down a 65-foot cliff, and find a Dutch family who happened to be hiking nearby. They gave him oreos and water and alerted authorities, who quickly rescued him.

Well, Ralston cut off his hand rather than losing his life in the hot desert sun. He figured it was better to live with one hand than to die with both. For the sake of a few years of life on this earth, he gave up a hand. But Jesus says that for the sake of eternal life with God, losing a hand is worth it.

a) Losing a Hand Is Comparatively Good, v. 30b

It hurt, I imagine, for Ralston to sever his hand with a dull knife. It was painful. But it was less painful than dying pinned under a boulder. Losing a hand, in Ralston's case, was comparatively good.

b) Failure to Control Your Hand Will Send You to Hell, v. 30c

But Jesus adds that a single wicked deed with your hand makes you liable to Hellfire. You can hit someone, sign a fake check, type a sleazy word into your computer, and so on. These are all sins of the hand. And they make you deserving of Hell. Remember, Hell is a place of conscious eternal torment. Hell is place from which the smoke of your burning will go up forever and ever. Hell is a place where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. And Hell is the place you will go if you let your hand do something wrong. Much better to cut it off than to go to hell. Much better to sever it than to die with it.

III. Implications

Why do I repeat myself like this? Because Jesus repeated Himself. He did so because this is a deadly serious. Don't classify sins into big and little and then figure that you're safe if you've avoided the big. That's not enough! Jesus says you must avoid all sin. You must cut off anything that allows you to sin.

A. Better Kill Sin than Go to Hell (This presupposes Justification)

Now, as I said a moment ago, ultimately what allows you to sin is your personhood. A sin is the deed of a person. A rock can't sin. A star can't sin (with apologies to Ramandu). The number 13 can't sin. But you can. Cutting off body parts won't prevent you from sinning.. They aren't the source of sin. No, the heart is the source of sin. And so what you need, more than anything, is a heart transplant. Only a new heart will make you a person who obeys Jesus' commands here. Only in this way can you kill sin. Your heart must be renewed. You must be united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. That's how you kill sin. You kill it by being united to Him by faith and spending time with Him. You kill sin by changing yourself, changing your personhood — not into another person, but into a new person. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. It is that new creation that cuts off sin and delivers you from hell. Nothing else will do it. No techniques. No willpower. No chemical helps. No strategic amputations. None of them will change the heart from which sin comes. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

B. Better Cut Off TV and Movies than Go to Hell

Nonetheless, if you have a new heart and yet find yourself (as I do) violating this command of Jesus, what do you do? Well, Jesus is not only saying that you must cut off all of yourself that implicates you in sinning. He's saying that you must cut off anything outside yourself that leads you into sin. If your TV offends you, cut it off. If you are tempted to watch shows that allow or entice you to lust, cut off that TV. Unplug it. Give it away. Same with movies. You probably know that a PG-13 rating allows filmmakers to show a topless woman. Do you watch movies that entice you or could entice you to lust? Cut them off. Jesus says the choice is literally between Heaven and Hell. If you don't believe that, then you're not disagreeing with me. You're disagreeing with Him. An awful lot of movies trade on prurient interest. An awful lot of TV shows contain an awful lot of immodest clothing and are designed to titillate you. Watching those shows is a sin, Jesus says. Anything that tempts you to lust is a sin.

C. Better Cut Off Internet than Go to Hell

Here's a biggie: Internet. Supposedly the YouPorn website gets more traffic than YouTube. We all know that umpteen bazillion sexual images, titillating articles, romantic fantasies, and suggestive costumes are available on the Internet. If that tempts you, then get rid of your Internet. "But I need it for work! I need it for school! I need it for this and that!" Yeah, well, I suppose you do. I suppose Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. I guess that was just hyperbole. You're right; better to keep your Internet connection and go to Hell.

Brothers and sisters, I don't want to be sarcastic here. The truth is that the Internet poses a gigantic problem for hundreds of millions of people. It is place riddled with sexual immorality. This is too obvious for me to mention. But I can tell you that if you're sure you have a new heart

in Christ, and yet you don't seem to be getting the better of your lust problem, then you will have to eliminate or significantly filter your Internet, probably for years, before you have a realistic hope of conquering this sin. As long as sin is easy, you will sin. You have to go on an Internet fast to give the Holy Spirit room to change your heart. I'm not making this up. I've experienced it firsthand. I've been there and I know. Let school go. Let work go. Cut off that Internet, and let the consequences be what they may. Your soul is more valuable than any degree or any job.

D. Better Cut Off Money than Go to Hell

The same is true for those who use their access to money to make lust available to them. Some people are suckers for pay-per-view stuff on TV or online. They don't just like the free porn; they want the pricey stuff. They like to go to nightclubs or strip shows. If this is you, then you have to erect walls to cut off your access to the money that makes these things possible for you. I'm not going to get into the specifics, but freezing your credit cards in a jar of mud is a start. Not carrying any cash or checks is another option. But know this: if you use money to provide for the lusts of your flesh, then you are going to Hell. Jesus is serious. He really means it. Lust will take you the bottom. Lust will submerge you in the pit forever.

If, then, there is some stumbling block scandalizing you and tripping you into sin, do whatever it takes to eliminate it. If you have to shut down your phone's web-browsing capability, do it. If you have to go without Internet entirely, do it. If you have to read books instead of watching TV, do it.

E. Better Repent than Go to Hell

But the problem is that when this teaching comes to us, it comes to all of us as sinners. We have already lusted. We have already done things that will in and of themselves be sufficient to send us to Hell. All the tips in the world, all the ways to avoid on-ramps to sin, will not be adequate to save us. Only thing will work. Literally cutting off your hand and poking out your eye won't save you. Only repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save you. Only turning away from every sin, and embracing God's gift of righteousness in Christ, will allow you to find that forgiveness and peace that you so desperately need.

You see, when you repent, you turn around. You stop driving toward Hell, and you start heading toward God and Heaven. Where do you want to end up? Are you willing to give up that sin that seems more precious to you than your right eye? Are you willing to turn away from everything that makes provision for your flesh? If not, Jesus says, then get ready for Hell.

But if you are willing, if you want righteousness and don't want sin, then embrace God's forgiveness in Jesus. Ask for that new heart. Continue to beg the Spirit to put to death in you the deeds of the flesh. And by so doing, you will live; you will be enter Heaven whole in body and spirit. Amen.

Sermon 17, Divorce, Matthew 5:31-32

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 1. Divorcing One's Wife Causes Her to Commit Adultery
 - a) Not in the technical sense that she is still married
 - b) Rather, in the sense that she retains a moral obligation to seek reconciliation with her ex rather than cut off that possibility by remarriage to a third party
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- III. Implications
 - A. Marriage Is Not Indissoluble, But Those Vows Are Binding!
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 - C. Divorce Is the Temporal Analogue to Eternal Hellfire
 - D. Divorce Is Not Unforgivable
 - E. Adultery Is Not Unforgivable!

Proposition: Divorce must be for sexual immorality; merely filing the right papers with the state isn't good enough!

Introduction

Most of us are married and know married people. How hard should you try to stay married? Is there any way out? Is there any way you can have a second chance? Or do you have to make the marriage you have work? This morning, we will look at the answer Jesus gives to these questions. We will find that you do have to make your marriage work. Starting over is not an option. Trying again is not an option. If you have “tied the knot,” taken the marriage vows, then you are morally obliged to keep those vows until the day you die.

Why should you listen this morning? Because you’re likely either married or divorced, or at the very least know people who are married and divorced. If you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, isn’t it imperative that you come to a clear understanding of what He clearly taught on this matter?

We pick it up at verse 31. This is the third “antithesis,” as some call it, or the third exposition, as I prefer to call it, of the six in Matthew 5. In every one of these six, Jesus cites the teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees in highly abbreviated form, sometimes in the very words of the Old Testament. Yet by implication He’s correcting Pharisaical misinterpretations of the OT. His exposition of what the law really required all along demonstrates how shallow and self-serving the Pharisees’ interpretation really was. In all 5 of the other cases, Jesus doesn’t contradict Moses. He fulfills him. In this passage, He does the same thing: He fulfills the teaching of Moses. He explains what Moses was saying all along. What I hope to show you this morning is this: Divorce must be for sexual immorality. Merely filing the right papers with the state isn’t good enough!

I. The Law: Divorce Must Follow Due Process of Law, v. 31

As with the other six antitheses in this chapter, Christ begins by stating in brief the Pharisees’ version of the law, as a guide to our understanding of what He’s talking about. Here, He is quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1.

A. Moses’ Divorce Law: Deuteronomy 24:1-4

The first thing to notice as we read this law is that it’s a law about remarriage after divorce. Its point is that if you get a divorce and your ex remarries, then you can never have her back. If she gets divorced, she’s off limits. If her new husband dies, she’s still off-limits.

This law allowed divorce. It allowed remarriage after divorce. But those weren’t the point of the law. Those are just incidental. The real point of the law is that you’d better think twice before getting a divorce, because this divorce is permanent. You can never get back what you have now, if you decide to go through with a divorce.

So that’s the key point of this law. The rest is just incidental. The rest does impinge on the question of divorce, and the proper legal procedure. But its goal is to make it crystal-clear that if you get divorced, you must be reconciled or else remain unmarried. If one of you remarries, then the relationship is forever terminated.

B. The Pharisees’ Interpretation

Well, how did the Pharisees read this law? They didn't emphasize the permanence of divorce. They emphasized the legal procedure.

1. "Uncleanness" Could Be Anything

Thus, in Jesus' day the dominant rabbinic school focused on the word "some" rather than the word "uncleanness." If a husband finds *something*, then he gets to divorce her! It doesn't have to be anything in particular. One rabbi even added that "something" could be burning dinner or finding a prettier woman somewhere else.

Now, in Jesus' day a stricter rabbinic school existed too. That group focused on the word "uncleanness" and said that divorce was permitted for sexual immorality. But they were a minority group, and very few divorces were given on the basis on sexual immorality.

A quick search reveals that we live in a similar society. Does anyone here except Brother Tom (a district judge for Campbell County) know what Wyoming's legal grounds for divorce are? Yes. Two. Irreconcilable differences or confinement in a mental institution for at least two years. You have to bring one or other of those grounds to be divorced in the Cowboy State. Nothing about uncleanness. Nothing about adultery. No — the boys in Cheyenne have passed laws that say that due process means filing the right papers and jumping through the right legal hoops!

2. Due Process Is Filing the Right Papers!

So, in Jesus' day, a signed, dated, divorce certificate with the signatures of two witnesses was the sum total of everything you needed to get a divorce. Only the husband could write it out, but once he wrote it out and delivered it to his wife, the marriage was kaput. At least, that was the civil law in first-century Palestine.

Again, the parallels to our modern situation are obvious. In the eyes of the state, you are divorced when all your documents have been filed at the courthouse and your decree of divorce is granted.

What did Moses think about that kind of scenario? Does Deut. 24 indicate that he was in favor of it?

C. Moses' Actual Meaning: Divorce (like Capital Punishment) Is a Remedy for Sin

No. Clearly, taking the Mosaic writings as a whole, we find that divorce is a remedy for sin. It's not a positive good in itself, any more than capital punishment is a positive good in itself. But it is good as a remedy for the problem of adultery — or, more generally speaking, the problem of hard-heartedness.

1. Marriage Is God-Created to be Lifelong and Monogamous, Gen. 2:24

If you go back to the beginning, Moses made it very clear that marriage is lifelong and monogamous. Marriage is supposed to be between one man and one woman. It's a closer relationship than the one between a parent and child. You *leave* your father and mother and cleave to your wife. You're joined to her by God Himself. You become one flesh. He who loves his wife loves himself. Gen. 2:24 is not just a description of what happens; it is legislation for

what ought to happen. You don't have to geographically move away from your parents. But you do have emotionally move on and recognize that this new unit of you and your wife is a new family, a "new decision-making unit," as my grandfather calls it. God joined Adam and Eve in marriage, and the implication is that He is the one who makes you one flesh.

2. Failure to Provide Due to Sexual Immorality Is Grounds for Divorce, Exodus 21:7-11

But Moses said something else about marriage. If a man took a slave wife, and after a while took another wife, he had to continue to provide his first wife with full cupboards, full closets, and full arms. If he did not do so, then she could go out free. She was no longer bound to him in marriage, and remarriage was perfectly appropriate for her.

What validated this divorce? The failure to provide in conjunction with the immorality of taking a second wife. Though Moses tolerated polygamy, he was himself monogamous and clearly taught that one man and one woman make a marriage.

3. "Some Uncleanness," Presumably Sexual, Is Grounds for Divorce, Deut. 24:1

Now as an aside from the main point of the law in Deut. 24:1-4, what can we derive about grounds for divorce? The passage mentions two different grounds: "some uncleanness" in v. 1, and "hate" in v. 3. Like many other interpreters, I think Moses is making a distinction between these two grounds. The first is valid, the second is not. Uncleanness means some kind of sexual indiscretion. Hate means the same thing as the modern "irreconcilable differences." But admittedly, that is not clearly present in the passage. Rather, it has to be derived from the testimony of the entire Bible. What is that testimony?

Its core idea is that Moses taught that marriage is permanent, monogamous, and lifelong. The only thing that can dissolve one's obligation to stay married/be reconciled is sexual immorality — either in the form of "some uncleanness," as in Deuteronomy 24:1, or in the form of taking another wife and unjustly cutting off the first wife from the privileges and provisions of marriage as in Exodus 21:7-11. In both cases, I believe based on Christ's exposition of Moses, some kind of sexual immorality is in view. (The other line of evidence that encourages me to believe this: In the first century, both Hillelites and Shammaites took for granted that the "some uncleanness" was adultery.) Most interpreters disagree with me on this, because the Old Testament contains many provisions for cases of sexual immorality among both married and single people. But the entire force of the arguments from those provisions depends on the unproven assumption that the OT law contained no redundancies. What is to prevent two different laws from being applicable, in different degrees, to the same case? Further, Jesus Himself did not acquiesce to the Pharisees' demand that He help them put to death an adulterous woman. Why not? One potential solution, and the only one that doesn't pit Christ against Moses here, is that the other procedures for dealing with sexual immorality were positive civil laws, while the provision for divorce in case of sexual immorality is the original moral law — superseded for a time, perhaps, in the Mosaic economy, but in force before and after that (on any

view) unique period in the history of God's people. Certainly the OT law contains more than one provision that seems unfair to our sense of justice. Yet the OT also clearly says that the Lord loves justice and will not do what is wrong. Yet Hagar got a divorce and a skin of water and that was about it. And that was at the direct command of God: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son!" (Genesis 21:10). Yes, these are the words of Sarah, but they are endorsed by God Himself two verses later! To argue that God can't do that because it's unjust and He's supremely just is to contradict the plain meaning of the text. Similarly, to argue that Deut. 24:1, with its vague description of "the nakedness of a thing," *can't* be referring to sexual immorality because of the great variety of other, mutually exclusive provisions for sexual immorality doesn't hold water. Some Israelites might have preferred a divorce over the death penalty. In other words, the differing provisions can be harmonized by the simple expedient of saying that different laws could have been applied to different cases.

4. Remarriage to a Third Party Renders Divorce Irreversible, Deut. 24:1-4

So we've established that while Deut. 24:1-4 does in fact allow for divorce in case of sexual uncleanness, its main goal is to ensure that divorce is irreversible the moment an ex-spouse marries a third party. One is tempted to say, "What God has separated let no man join together." That's Moses' point: think long and hard before you divorce. You can more than likely never go back to what you have now.

II. Jesus' "Yes, And:" Divorce Must be for Sexual Immorality; No Other Reason Is Valid!, v. 32

Well, as with the other statements in this chapter, Jesus affirms the teaching of the OT and then expounds it on a deeper level than the Pharisees had ever thought about it. Divorce is not about jumping through the right legal hoops, or even about following due process of law. Rather, divorce is the termination of a marriage which by design and by God's command ought to be lifelong. Jesus doesn't specifically bring that up here. But if we go to His further teaching on the same subject later in Matthew, we see it very clearly.

A. The Principle: Marriage Ought to be Lifelong, Matt. 19:3-6

1. If Married, You Are Morally Obligated to Stay Married

Jesus immediately takes the issue back to Moses. Don't you recognize that the one who made them made them male and female? Now, as a total aside, this alone is enough to put to an end forever all this gender dysphoria and transgender stuff. If you are male, God made you that way. If you are female, God made you that way. Submit to it! Yes, I recognize that some people suffer from a nagging internal sense that they ought to be the other gender. If that is you, you have my sympathies. Such a nagging feeling is a curse from God, part of living in a fallen world. It can safely be compared to other people who have a strong nagging feeling that they ought to be drunk, or that they ought to be having an affair. Many people feel overwhelmingly powerful internal compulsions towards really wicked things. Who am I to say that they haven't felt those compulsions from birth? But regardless of how intense your compulsion is, the Word of God is

fixed and firm. God created you male or He created you female. He's been doing it this way from the beginning. And if you feel otherwise, then by the power of the Holy Spirit you need to tell those feelings that they are *wrong*. Yes, *wrong*. Morally wrong and factually wrong. Men, I don't care how much you feel like a woman. You're not. And vice versa.

So Jesus appeals to the creation order to make it clear that marriage is a lifelong comprehensive union of one man and one woman, ordered to family life and uniquely suited to permanence. This is something that's true of no other relationship, including the parent-child relationship and any kind of same-sex relationship. Haven't you read that, Pharisees?

Imagine coming to me, your pastor, and excitedly reporting to me that you had found some huge hole in your employer's auditing practices, and that furthermore you had already exploited this loophole to embezzle half a million dollars. My feelings would perhaps be roughly the same as Jesus' feelings here. "Haven't you read that theft is wrong? Don't you know what the Bible says about stealing and embezzling?"

The Pharisees seemed totally ignorant of what Moses had taught about marriage. The point is not how many ways it's possible to justify divorce, but rather, what is the nature of marriage? Marriage *per se* is a lifelong comprehensive union that can be described as "no longer two, but one flesh."

In other words, if you're married, then you must stay married. It is a moral obligation that binds you. You have as much obligation to keep those marriage vows as you do to honor your parents or tell the truth.

Now, does that disagree with what Moses allowed in Deut. 24 and Ex. 21? No. Though the vast majority of interpreters disagree with me, I can't follow them. Jesus is not abrogating the words of Moses, except in their temporary civil-law capacity. In other words, Jesus is not in disagreement with Moses here. The only OT provision that He abrogates is that of the mandatory divorce certificate. That was a cultural provision made to protect women. Nowadays, we have a slightly different official document that fulfills all the functions of the divorce certificate, and thus, our civil law in that particular respect is quite sufficient. But aside from that, Jesus and Moses speak with one voice: marriage is permanent and lifelong. If you get into it, don't even think about getting out again!

2. Civil Divorce *Per Se* Cannot Remove this Moral Obligation

Get a divorce and go marry someone else, says Jesus, and you're committing adultery. That is, you are sinning against the requirements of the seventh commandment. God requires that you remain unmarried and seek reconciliation with your spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-11). The sin in remarriage is not because divorce is heinous and unforgivable. Rather, it comes from the binding nature of marriage. Marriage gives the legal right to have conjugal relations with your spouse. You can get a civil divorce, but you can't thereby terminate your responsibility to seek to return to that spouse! The civil law is not capable of dissolving moral obligations.

We could draw a parallel with bankruptcy here. In this republic, you can borrow huge sums of money, then go bankrupt and be civilly absolved from the duty to repay those sums. But

does anyone here really think that this is anything but legalized theft? If I borrow 250k from the church to finance my private airplane, then go bankrupt, will anyone say that I did nothing wrong? I trust not.

Now, again, what's the sin? Is the divorce the huge, heinous, unforgivable sin? Well, go back to the parallel. Is bankruptcy the huge, heinous, unforgivable sin? No. The bankruptcy isn't the problem. It's the incurring of an obligation to repay, and then waving the magic wand of the state over that moral obligation and thereby dissolving it, then acting like you should never have been asked to repay that money, that is the sin. The sin is failing to fulfill your obligation, regardless of what the state says.

3. If You're Divorced, You Ought to be Reconciled with your Ex!, 1 Cor. 7:10-11

Well, in divorce the sin is the same. The sin is not so much the divorce as it is using the divorce as an excuse to cast off your moral obligations. If you get a divorce, remain unmarried or marry each other again. Don't go off and marry someone else. Don't say, "Hey, I'm single and so I can do whatever I want!" Well, you are single. Paul calls this divorced person "unmarried" in v. 11. But you have moral obligations binding you to seek reconciliation.

Really, we could say that all of this is an extension of "blessed are the peacemakers." Remember that peace is the union of the appetite's inclinations and unity of purpose and desire with those around you. You are called to live at peace with your spouse — to be united and agreed at the deepest level possible. Remember, it's not peace when you agree together to break God's law. It's not peace when you mutually agree that you want to go your separate ways and the marriage can be over. Marriage can be entered simply by a free consent to be married, but divorce cannot be given just by a free consent to be divorced. No. You have a moral obligation to stay married or be reconciled. It's a command from God.

B. The Exception: Sexual Immorality can free you from the Moral Obligation to Remain Married or Be Reconciled, Matt. 5:32

When Jesus gives this exception, what is He saying? If you divorce, you must remain unmarried or be reconciled. But there is one exception: if your spouse has committed adultery, or you have committed adultery, then it is permissible to dissolve the marriage. You are not morally bound to try to resuscitate the relationship. You are free to move on and marry someone else, without sinning. In short, we could say that sexual immorality attacks the one-flesh union to the point that it is grounds for removing the moral obligation to keep your marriage vows and stay together for life. This is the only exception Jesus mentions, both here and in chapter 19. You may get divorced (and remarry) for sexual immorality. But unless there is sexual immorality, divorce is unjustified.

C. The Consequences

So, what does this teaching of Jesus imply?

1. Divorcing One's Wife Causes Her to Commit Adultery

Why does divorcing your wife cause her to commit adultery? The idea is that if you divorce on unbiblical grounds, you and your wife both continue to be obligated to be married to each other and to no one else. The idea is not that you are “still married in the sight of God.” To my way of thinking, that explanation loads the term “adultery” with more metaphysical baggage than it can well bear. A more common-sense explanation is not that it is impossible for you to get a divorce, but rather that any divorce on unbiblical grounds does not remove your moral obligation to be reconciled to one another. Cutting off that possibility by remarrying a third party is a violation of what the law commands you to do. In a taxonomy of commands, we would specifically say that it's the commandment against committing adultery that obligates you to do this.

Think of it this way. One of my college friends was engaged to be married. I was to be a groomsman. The marriage was going to be on a Saturday. Tuesday afternoon he calls me and says, “Caleb, I had a one-night stand last night. I went out to a nightclub, got drunk, went home with some girl . . . anyway, the wedding is all off.”

Now, would you call that adultery? More or less. I don't think anyone in the room would object to saying that having a one-night stand days before your wedding is a thoroughly adulterous thing to do. But was my friend actually married before the wedding? No, of course not! But though unmarried, we could say that he had deeper moral obligations to be faithful to his fiancée than he did to simply abstain from sexual immorality. In other words, his crime was worse than if an completely unattached person had gone to a nightclub and had a one-night stand.

Jesus' key point in using the word “adultery,” as I hope this example makes clear, is not to assert conclusively that invalidly divorced people are “still married in the sight of God.” Rather, it is to assert that moral obligations to be married to their original spouse still bind them, just as moral obligations to be faithful to his fiancée bind an engaged man.

So if you divorce your wife, you are likely making remarriage an economically vital action for her. You are putting her in such financial hardship that she will likely have to “commit adultery” — i.e., marry somebody else in order to live. That is a violation of her moral obligation to be reconciled in marriage with you. But because you divorced her and there was nothing she could do about it, you are guilty of making her commit adultery.

2. Marrying a Divorced Woman Is an Adulterous Act

The same thing goes for marrying a divorced woman. That too is an adulterous act on your part, Jesus says, because that woman was supposed to be reconciled to her husband. By marrying you, she is openly defying that obligation and closing the door on it permanently. This is breaking the Seventh Commandment, with its implicit command of loyalty and permanence in marriage.

III. Implications

Well, I hope all of us feel convicted, not smug. If you've never been divorced, don't you dare look around and judge those who have! Are many divorces sinful? Of course! Are all divorces a remedy for sin? Absolutely. But as we'll see in a minute, the solution to the problem of divorce is the same as the solution to every other sin: repent and obey from whatever corner you've sinned yourself into.

A. Marriage Is Not Indissoluble, But Those Vows Are Binding!

The first implication from what we've seen is that marriage is not indissoluble. Many strands of Christianity teach that what God has joined together, man *cannot* put asunder. This is a little strange, though. You won't find the Bible commanding us not to be angels, or telling us to be sure that we don't exist before we begin to exist. Why not? Because we can't do those things. They are what's technically called "impossible" for human beings to do. Where does God tell us not to do what only He can do? "Don't change that oak tree into a poodle!" He doesn't issue any commands telling us not to do the impossible. We are told not to break the moral law, but God never says, "Be sure you obey my decrees."

Anyway, the very fact that Jesus says we should not put asunder indicates very clearly that we can do so. Just as "don't take God's name in vain" presupposes that we *can* take God's name in vain, so "don't put asunder" presupposes that we can put asunder.

But even though marriage is dissoluble, marriage vows are binding. You continue to be morally obligated to keep your vows, or if wrongly divorced to get back into a position where you can keep your vows, no matter what the state says. The only sufficient reason for dissolving the marriage bond with which God Himself binds every married couple — the only valid reason for dissolving that bond is sexual immorality. The rest of Scripture makes it clear that you may submit to your unbelieving partner's dissolving of the marriage bond. But Jesus here isn't talking about what might happen to you; He's talking about what you personally are allowed to do. You can't fix anybody else or control anybody else, and of course the Lord knows that. So He gives instructions directly to us about the sin of divorce. He doesn't mention what might be done to you; He only mentions what you might do.

So — where do you go from here? If you're wrongly divorced, seek reconciliation. If your spouse won't be reconciled, then you are free from the marriage (assuming you have brought the pressure of the entire church to bear on a professing believer, Matthew 18, and then had that ex-spouse declared an unbeliever, per 1 Cor. 7:15). If your spouse is willing to be reconciled, get together again. Remarry. Enjoy the fruits of Christ's peacemaking!

But what if you're wrongly divorced and remarried? First off, confess your sin and repent of it. Then pray for God's grace to make the new marriage work. You committed adultery in contracting that marriage, but God forgives. He will forgive everyone who sincerely repents.

B. Divorce Is the Outcome of Lust

The context, where Jesus talks about the true meaning of lust and adultery, makes it clear that divorce is the outcome of lust. Logically, of course, this is the culmination of His exposition of

the 7th commandment. What starts with lust ends with divorce, and it proceeds by way of the worst kind of sexual sin — viz., adultery.

Do you want to get a divorce? Let yourself live in lust. Do you want to break the commands of God and suffer the consequences? Then go ahead and lust. But know that divorce is more painful than you can possibly imagine. I once broke an engagement, thankfully without the preceding one-night stand (on either side). That hurt more than anything else I've ever done. I can only imagine what divorce feels like. But ask anyone you know who's been divorced, if you want to find out whether it's a pleasant experience.

C. Divorce Is the Temporal Analogue to Eternal Hellfire

Indeed, the context makes it clear that divorce is analogous to hell. Do you want to know what it might feel like to go to hell forever? Then let yourself lust. Don't cut off your hand. Don't put out your eye. Buy better Internet service and a bigger computer screen. And you will end up divorced, suffering in miniature the pains that sin always brings. Better to get rid of that thing you must have rather than let your marriage die. Better to give up your own way than to get a divorce. Better to cut off your hand and pluck out your eye than suffer the pains of divorce. Yes, for hard hearts divorce is sometimes necessary. But it's never nice.

D. Divorce Is Not Unforgivable

Nonetheless, divorce is not unforgivable! Even those sectors of the church which teach that one can never be remarried after divorce do not teach that divorce is the unforgivable sin. Far from it. They hold that position because of their high regard for marriage! "I'm divorced; can I be remarried?" The answer of these churches is, "Sorry, sir, but you're not divorced. We don't officiate bigamous weddings." Even the most hard-line "no divorce" people know, understand, and believe that divorce can be forgiven, just like other sins.

If you are divorced, this sermon is not intended to make you live in guilt. It is intended to help you understand the Lord's teaching, and then to return to Him with redoubled gratitude and confidence in His forgiveness! Yes, His forgiveness requires something of you: it requires that you seek reconciliation with your former spouse. Even if remarriage is now impossible because you've married someone else, you can still apologize. You can still confess your sins and ask forgiveness. You can still be reconciled. I've seen it, with my own eyes: a couple divorced for adultery, one remarried, who today worship God together in peace and joy and harmony. Divorce can be forgiven by the grace of God on the basis of the blood of Christ. Because He took the penalty for the sin of divorce, you are freed from that penalty.

E. Adultery Is Not Unforgivable!

Similarly, the worst sexual sin of all, adultery, can be forgiven. If you've committed adultery today, whether by a lingering glance such as we talked about last week, or by a wrongful divorce, or by good old-fashioned cheating on your spouse, know that God forgives. Jesus says here that if you divorce on invalid grounds, you commit adultery. But He forgives adulterers. He forgave David and Bathsheba. He forgave the woman taken in adultery. He forgave Mary Magdalene,

assuming adultery was her crime. And He will forgive everyone who repents and asks forgiveness like those people did!

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. (Psa 51:7-9 NKJ)

If that is your prayer this morning, then I assure you that your sins are forgiven. Go, and sin no more. Amen.