

## SERMON ON THE MOUNT: ADULTERY AND DIVORCE

**Read Matthew 5:27-32**

It would be easy to avoid this passage. But although Jesus was teaching 2000 years ago, this stuff is really relevant for today.

Divorce. Somewhere 40-50% marriage end in divorce in NZ. Stats suggest the average live in relationship lasts 2-4 years. Adultery. 20-25% of married men affair. 10-15% of married women affair. Lust. Here are some stats from Christian website covenant eyes.

- 64% of Christian men 15% of Christian women watch porn at least once a month.
- 90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about porn with their friends.
- Just 55% of adults 25 and older believe porn is wrong.
- Teens and young adults 13-24 believe not recycling is worse than viewing pornography.
- Only 43% of teens believe porn is bad for society, compared to 31% of young adults 18-24, 51% of Millennials, 44% Gen-Xers, and 59% of Boomers.

These passages can easily bring condemnation. Esp if you are struggling with pornography, or if divorced or remarried. Passages like this can be used to whack you over the head.

We sometimes have an idea that issues of rampant sexuality, porn are new issues. And that the ancient world was somehow more proper, chaste. Not true. In Roman empire ordinary plates and pottery had pornographic pictures on them. Greek culture was incredibly sexually explicit. Worship at the temples meant having sex with prostitutes. There was no idea of sexual faithfulness to ones wife. Homosexual behaviour was normal. While the Romans took over the Greek empire Greek culture took over Roman culture. In Jewish culture they had the OT laws around sexuality, adultery, divorce. But they had found some loop holes. A man could divorce a woman for basically any reason, according to one school of thought. The example given was of burning the toast. The man just had to write out a notice of divorce. This left woman incredibly vulnerable with no rights. Their ability to remarry was hindered because they were divorced. So they would stay in abusive relationship for economic survival.

V26 This is the 7<sup>th</sup> command and fairly straightforward.  
V27 Jesus is saying. Actually adultery starts in the heart, with the eyes. I loved Jeff illustration last week of his coffee keep mug. Nice on the outside but moldy on the inside because he forgets to take it out of the car. While this is addressed to men, it applies to both genders. The act of adultery starts well before the physical act. It starts when we allow our eyes to look at someone as an object of pleasure. It starts when we our minds start to fantasize about someone else other than our partner

Affairs start in the heart. Then they lead to small actions that seem harmless. A little bit of flirting. A little bit of extra time with someone at work. A little bit of sharing with someone. Just putting ourselves in a position that makes us vulnerable. Then it continues with a believing a little lie, I would be so happy if I had sex with that person. If I was with that person my life would be better. It always starts with something in our heart that desires someone who is not ours.

With all the sermon on the mount teaching there is this phrase. You have heard. The law says this, but I say this. Jesus lifts the bar to an impossible standard. Because even if we have never murdered someone, or had an affair with someone, once we start getting to a heart level, the bar is impossible to meet. We have all thought things that we know are not godly.

So on one hand this passage dispels our pride and arrogance. Jesus is exposing the legalistic attitudes of the day. Still have today. We are all guilty and need gods grace. No point judging others thinking we are better than others. when Jesus says actually it is the heart that is at issue here. Not just what we do on the outside.

V29-30 Now this is not literal. Otherwise at very least all the men would be blind and Richard Lobb would lose half his cliental. Form of Jewish speech that was recognized as a way to make a point. *What Jesus is saying. Take drastic action to deal with whatever it is that is causing you so sin.* If it is Pornography. First step. Tell someone. Confess, put it into the light. Find someone who willing to be accountable. Put software on phone. Do a Valiant Man course. If it is a relationship, cut it off. If it romantic novels that are causing you to wish for a better husband, ditch them. Do whatever you need to do. As it says in Proverbs 6:27 If you play with fire, you will get burnt. You will pay a price. Ultimately that price could lead you totally away from God himself.

*This passage is revolutionary for its time. Still is today.* We live in a strange era. On one hand porn has become mainstream. On the other hand, the Me Too movement has exposed the abuse of women by men. And somehow these two things co exist beside each other

This passage affirms women as made in the image of God. Women are not to be treated as objects for male pleasure. When we accept porn as normal, we are demeaning someone who is made in the image of God. Making physical bodies and physical pleasure to be an idol. We need to speak up when in our workplace when we see sexism at work. Objectifying of women.

V31-32 The OT law referred to was Duet 24:1. This is not very clear, but does talk about issuing a certificate of divorce



for indecency. There were two rabbinic schools of interpretation. One said the indecency meant adultery. The other said indecency could mean almost anything, including the wife not cooking the husbands meal properly. Human nature being what it is, the second school of thought was more popular.

Jesus goes back to Gods original intent. Marriage is a permanent union between a man and woman. God hates divorce (Mal 2:16) because it tears apart what is intended to be permanent, and in doing so causes damage. So legally speaking an illicit divorce as it were creates adultery if either party remarries. But Jesus does give an exception. If the marriage is torn apart by “pornea” - not the word for adultery, that is used in the above passage, then divorce is allowed. What is pornea? Well it is what we get pornography from. It is less specific than adultery but more than something frivolous. It includes any activity that intentionally divides the marriage relationship. So that would include physical and psychological abuse, abandonment.

This is like the Mosaic law designed to protect the innocent party from committing adultery. (in a legal sense)

Now it is important to note what is not said here:

- # Does not say you must divorce is abuse or adultery. Lots of wonderful examples of marriages, where there has been forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.
- # Does not say if you remarry in “Biblically legitimate” way, that you have committed adultery. In fact Jesus is affirming the ability to remarry.
- # Does not say if remarry having divorced for reasons other than “pornea” that you have committed an unpardonable sin.

In teaching this Jesus was though challenging the status quo He was challenging the system of easy divorce that made a mockery of the sanctity of marriage. How do we apply this today in our context:

# **Christian marriage is not the same as secular marriage.** It is a life long covenant that is to mirror the covenant that God has with us. The old vows for better or worse, sickness and health, richer or poorer till death do us part reflect this. Unfortunately while sometime those vows are still used, often what is meant is I will love you if you keep me happy, and complete me, and help me fulfil my destiny. But if you no longer keep me happy and you no longer complete me and no longer help me fulfil my destiny, then I am no longer required to keep on loving you because you are not keeping your end of the bargain. We live in a culture that has idolized romantic love and self fulfilment as the primary purpose on life., The old vows reflect God’s covenant relationship with us. God’s love is not dependant on our performance.

# **If you are divorced, remarried,** God does not hate you. He hates divorce because of the pain it causes, and because divorce is caused by sin. Result of sin. Not sin itself. If you have been sinned against by adultery abuse, you do not need to feel guilty about getting out. If you broke marriage through adultery, abuse, neglect, you need to own this before God and ask for forgiveness. Got to honestly own your part in the marriage failure. Even if you feel innocent party, there will be ways you contributed to the breakdown of the

relationship and it is important to own these so that you don’t take these into a new relationship. It is important for you to know you are not somehow second class citizens in the church or in the kingdom.

# **If you are married. Encourages us** Be faithful to your spouse. Take responsibility to love them, rather than see their faults. Ask God for a fresh love for your spouse. Think of one thing you can do today to show your spouse you love them. If you don’t know their love language find out - it is highly likely to be different from yours, and then deliberately show love in that language. Seek God to complete and fulfil you. No person can do that. The best thing you can do for your marriage is to grow in your relationship with God. Know his love.

# **For everyone.** These teachings of Jesus where he says he have heard but I say are all pointing us towards Gods grace. Sure we might not swear, might appear good and upright, never killed anyone, tell the truth, never had an affair. But Jesus cuts through all that. To what is in our heart. And once we get there, we all need God’s grace. We can’t judge the murderer who is in prison or the person who had an affair or the person who is addicted to something because God’s standard is not just outward behaviour. God’s standard is what is happening in our hearts. And at that point we are all sunk. At that point we are all sinners desperately in need of God’s grace.

#### 4 things you need to hear:

- Take drastic action to deal with whatever is pulling your heart astray.
- Work at loving your spouse to nurture your marriage
- Divorce and remarriage don’t devalue you in God’s eyes
- We all need God’s grace so avoid pride and judgement

What is the one thing God is asking you to do this morning?

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- How can we address the epidemic of porn usage within the church? What concerns you about the statistics that are given?
- What are the key influences in society today working against a Christian marriage? How can we counter them?
- How would you explain what makes a Christian marriage different to your neighbor?
- What would you say to a couple who are living together who argue the “bit of paper” is of no value?
- Is their still a stigma around divorce in church circles? Should a divorced person be a pastor/ leader?
- What distinguishes someone who has experienced God’s grace to someone who hasn’t?



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