

Main Idea: In Matthew 5:27-32, Jesus calls on His followers to uphold the sanctity of marriage by confronting two foes of this important God-designed institution. One happens in the heart. The other happens in the courtroom.

- I. Jesus upholds the sanctity of marriage by showing the connection between adultery and the heart (27-30).
 - A. He cites accepted teaching (27).
 - B. He exposes the root problem of lust (28).
 1. It starts in the heart.
 2. It works through the eyes.
 - C. He calls for radical amputation (29-30).
 1. Make it as difficult as possible to repeat the sin.
 2. It's better to limp into heaven than leap into hell.
- II. Jesus upholds the sanctity of marriage by showing the connection between adultery and the courtroom (31-32).
 - A. He cites accepted teaching (31).
 - B. He exposes what divorce does (32).
 1. It causes problems for the woman.
 2. It causes problems for another man.

Implications: Jesus calls us to uphold the sanctity of marriage.

1. What's going on in my heart?
2. What do I need to do with my eyes and hands this week?

There are so many reasons to love and trust Jesus Christ. Certainly, one of the greatest is that He willingly left the splendor of His heaven to come and rescue us by dying in our place on the cross. But there are so many other reasons, and we're going to see one this morning. We should love and trust Him because *He loves us enough to tell us the truth, even when it's painful to hear.*

Most of us tend to shrink back from doing that. We don't want to hurt people's feelings, so we avoid saying what would be in their best interest to hear. Not Jesus. He doesn't hold back from us anything that would be for our good.

That's important for me to say as I prepare to read and then preach a message on the following words of Jesus. These may be hard words for us to hear. They are convicting words, words that might even irritate us if we forget who is saying them. We are about to hear the words of the most loving person who ever lived, Jesus the Savior.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:27-32

I've just read for you from the sermon on the mount. We've been carefully working through this sermon for some time now. This is King Jesus speaking. He began with the beatitudes. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (5:3).” Who participates in heaven's kingdom? The *spiritually bankrupt* do, said Jesus. Not the self-sufficient, but those who admit they have nothing to offer such a King.

And they *mourn* over that. “Blessed are those who mourn,” said Jesus next. They grieve over their sin. And they are *meek* too. And they *hunger and thirst* for what they know they lack...*righteousness.*

Yet there's one person who will never do that. He will never hunger and thirst for righteousness because righteous is precisely how he sees himself. He is *self-righteous*, and as far as he's concerned, he's just fine with God.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the series preached at WBC in 1988.

Jesus has a message for people who think they are okay with God because of the good lives they are living, in verse 20, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

This is stunning. The scribes and Pharisees were the good guys in first century Israel. Clean living. Upstanding. Very religious. Zealous for God’s law. And on a path that will take them to hell, said Jesus.

It’s significant that Jesus talked a lot about hell. In fact, it may surprise you to know that Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. Can an intelligent, loving person believe in and talk about a place like hell? Jesus, the lover of our souls, did. But it’s interesting to note who received His strongest words about hell. Not the wicked sinners (like the prostitutes and tax collectors), but the self-righteous ones.

“You snakes! You brood of vipers!” said Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:33. “How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

That indicting question will come a couple of years later, after the self-righteous have dug in their heels again and again to Jesus’ attempts to save their souls, just before they cry out, “Crucify Him!” But as Jesus speaks from that Galilean hillside in Matthew 5, He’s just starting His public ministry, and they’re checking Him out, and they can’t believe what they’ve just heard.

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

What did He mean by that? We need not wonder, for He gives a clear answer in verses 21-48, which is Jesus’ exposition of verse 20. Keep in mind that Jesus is talking about the most religious people in Israel, the scribes and Pharisees. His criticism is not that they weren’t good, but that they weren’t *good enough*. And He begins to show them in this section.

He reveals in living color the nature of the kingdom of God for His disciples. He illustrates the Christian-counter culture. He demonstrates for us the difference between genuine righteousness and pharisaic, legalistic righteousness. In these verses, Jesus identifies the surface problem, but then pinpoints the real heart problem.

Notice the phrase Jesus uses six times to highlight a series of contrasts. “You have heard that it was said,” in verses 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, & 43.” Followed by “But I say unto you in verses 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, & 44.”

He begins with **murder**. Verse 21, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not murder.’” To which the self-righteous nods his head. “That’s right. Murder is bad, and I’ve never murdered anyone. So, check, I’m a good person.”

Hold on, says Jesus in verse 22. “But I say to you, that everyone who is angry is liable to judgment.” In the eyes of God, looks do kill. And so do words. Ever called anybody a “fool”? If you have, says Jesus, you are “liable to the hell of fire.”

Jesus doesn’t sound very loving here, does He? Actually, He is the definition of love, which means, this is what true love does. Love doesn’t put a band-aid on a deadly cancer, but does everything in its power to remove the cancer.

Jesus’ point is that if your righteousness is merely external, you’re in trouble. Hell is full of people who can say, “I never murdered anybody.” But they are just as guilty as a murderer, in God’s eyes. Jesus will later explain, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, etc. These are what defile a person (Matt 15:19-20).”

Sin is not a popular topic these days, even in church. But Jesus didn’t avoid the subject of sin. He forced people to think about sin, their own sin. Is that unloving? It

might be, were it not for the rest of His message. He says there's a remedy for sin, that He Himself is that remedy. "Ask, and it shall be given to you (7:7)."

At this point Jesus moves to a second example of a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, in Matthew 5:27-32. He uses the word "adultery" four times, in verse 27, in verse 28, and then twice in verse 32. So, He's talking about adultery here. But actually, He's upholding the sanctity of marriage by confronting two foes of this righteous, God-designed institution. One happens in the heart. The other happens in the courtroom.

I. Jesus upholds the sanctity of marriage by showing the connection between adultery and the heart (27-30).

Notice verse 27, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" As Jesus begins, once again...

A. He cites accepted teaching (27). Yes, they had heard this. Jesus is quoting the Law of God, the seventh commandment, found in Exodus 20:14, repeated in Deuteronomy 5:18. God prohibited adultery.

Behind this negative command was also a positive expectation. No adultery, for sure. Instead, love your spouse. Be absolutely faithful to your marriage partner.

This was always God's intent for the seventh commandment. God's image-bearers are to do everything in their power to uphold the sanctity of marriage. This starts with their own marriages, but it applies to the institution of marriage as well. One man, one woman, until death do us part. This is marriage, and this is the law of God.

But the self-righteous always take a very narrow approach to sin, a very external approach. And so, for the scribes and Pharisees, sexual sin referred only to the very act of adultery.

And then, combined with their narrow definition of adultery, they had a broad definition of marital fidelity. Adultery for the Jews was seen not so much as a matter of impurity, as a matter of theft. They taught that the reason it is wrong for a man to commit adultery is because he is stealing another man's wife.

Sin is action. Sin is external. So righteousness is action and external too. So believes the self-righteous, as he congratulates himself on how he's living.

But Jesus loves self-righteous people too much to let them remain in their self-righteous stupor. Remember the time the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman they had caught in the very act of adultery? It's in John 8:1-11. Remember what happened? They put the woman in front of Jesus, and challenged Him with a question. "The Law says we should stone her. What do you say?"

How did Jesus respond? The Bible says that Jesus bent down and wrote with His finger on the ground. Why did He do that? Listen to what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 9:10, "And the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God." And now we see that finger again, and this time we hear His voice explaining what He meant by those written words.

"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7)." And they all walked away.

Jesus loves sinners. He loved the adulteress enough to forgive her and then command her to leave her life of sin. And He loved the self-righteous Pharisees enough to force them to see the truth that they were not as righteous as they had thought.

That's what He's doing with all of us in Matthew 5. First, He tells us that we can commit murder with our words. Now He tells us that we can commit adultery in our hearts.

Notice verse 28, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Martyn Lloyd Jones explains, "Sin is not merely a matter of actions and deeds; it is something within the heart that leads to the action."²

B. He exposes the root problem of lust (28). In the AV, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. He focuses, not on externals, not only on forbidden action, but also on the forbidden thought as well. He makes it clear that physical adultery is the result of heart adultery, and heart adultery is the result of eye adultery.

The real problem with adultery is twofold.

1. *It starts in the heart.* That's the lustful intent.

2. *It works through the eyes.* That's the lustful look. Before there's ever an adulteress action, there's an adulteress intent in the heart and look through the eyes.

When Jesus says "look", He's not referring to a casual glance. Perhaps the word "stare" best captures the idea.

Men, Jesus is speaking directly to us. There are indeed valuable implications for woman as well, but Jesus is talking directly to men here. Adultery begins in the heart and works through a look, a stare. It begins when we view a woman who has value and worth in God's sight, not as a person, but as a thing, an object to be used, a way to enjoy oneself.

Notice that there is a purpose in this forbidden look. The ESV calls it "lustful intent." The word "lust" can have a positive force, as in Matthew 13:17, "Many prophets have *desired* to see the things which you see." But usually the word is used in a bad sense, as in Romans 1:24 (AV), "God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves."

Desire is a God-given drive. Desire is good. God has given mankind a way to enjoy this God-given sexual desire, that is, marriage. Yet tragically, we pervert and pollute this good, God-given desire for the opposite sex when we seek to fulfill it outside the parameters of marriage.

Jesus is not prohibiting sexual attraction as expressed between a husband and wife. Husbands ought to look at their wives, and wives their husbands, with great enjoyment, as the book of Song of Solomon so beautifully expresses. But to cast that look upon anyone other than one's spouse, Jesus says, is to commit adultery with that person in one's heart.

This "looking and lusting" hits close to home, doesn't it? It speaks to men and boys. Jesus says that if we look at a woman with lustful intent, whether she's across the room, or on a movie screen, or in a magazine, or on our computer, or on our cell phone, we have committed adultery with her in our heart.

Does this apply to women? At first glance, we might conclude that Jesus seems to be speaking only to men here. He says, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has committed adultery with her."

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 237.

But of course, women struggle with lust too, don't they? A woman can look at another woman with lustful, lesbian intent. And when that happens, says Jesus, she too has committed adultery in her heart.

Yet there's another more subtle way. I found a very insightful article by a biblical counselor, Rick Thomas, entitled, "*Men Are Tempted to Lust – Women Are Tempted to Be Lusted After.*" Thomas explains:

God put an attraction gene in both the male and female. In Genesis 1 and 2, the concept of looking at a girl and being liked by a guy was God's design. Adam was the pursuer and Eve was what he wanted. And it was good.

Then the man and the woman fell in the garden.

Sin opened Adam's eyes in ways he could never have imagined before. And Eve walked in her kind of darkness. They both enjoyed their unique versions of lust... Adam wanted Eve for self-serving purposes. Eve wanted Adam to pursue her for self-serving purposes.

Eve's sin is why women are easily tempted to seduce or manipulate a man. For some women, it is because they enjoy the tantalizing power they can exert over a guy... There are millions of women who love God, but sin tempts them to manipulate the opinions of others by how they present themselves to others.

These women are gaze capturers. Are you a gaze capturer? Do you secretly enjoy the power (perverse security) you feel when people notice you? Do you secretly enjoy the ability to control (perverse security) others by your beauty?³

So, Jesus has something to say to all of us. We're all tempted. Men can be tempted to lust, and women can be tempted to be lusted after. And there are all sorts of variations of these lusts. Men can be gaze capturers too. James 1:14 says, "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by *his own desire.*" And when we give in to *our own desires*, whatever they may be, we have committed sin in our hearts.

So, what should we do about it? The world around us says, don't do anything, because there's not a problem. In fact, society turns it all around and says that sexual expression in any form is good and healthy and fulfilling, and that any talk about curbing those passions is bad and harmful.

But Jesus doesn't think like the world thinks, nor should we, His followers.

C. He calls for radical amputation (29-30). "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

There have been those who approached this command literally. In the third century, Origen embraced asceticism, renouncing all possessions, food, even sleep. And in an overliteral interpretation of this passage, and of Matthew 19:12, he actually made himself a eunuch.

Of course, Jesus is not talking about literally maiming our bodies. He's not calling for mutilation, rather mortification (Romans 6:12ff). When there's sexual sin involved, what's needed is a strategic battle plan that involves tenacious, moral, self-denial.

³<https://rickthomas.net/men-are-tempted-to-lust-women-are-tempted-to-be-lusted-after/>

Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away." He tells us that we need to guard our eyes, radically guard our eyes. Pluck it out. Throw it away. Heart adultery begins with our eyes. Our eyes feed our imaginations.

Imagination is a God-given gift, one of the things that distinguishes us from animals. But if our imagination is fed dirt by our eyes, it too will become dirty. And once our imaginations are dirty, they will influence our hands, our actions, what we do.

What is Jesus telling us to do? This...

1. *Make it as difficult as possible to repeat the sin.* Get rid of the pictures. Erase the phone contact. Burn the magazine. Cancel the internet subscription. Take radical action to eliminate the temptation source. Get an accountability partner. No more lunches with the opposite sex.

Jesus says that our eyes and feet can "offend" us (in the AV, Jesus says, "If thy right eye *offend* thee"), literally "trip us up" and cause us to stumble. The word "stumble" was used to refer to the "bait stick in a trap".

This word brings two pictures to mind. First, the picture of a cord stretched across a path, deliberately put there to make a man trip. Second, the picture of a pit dug in the ground, and deceptively covered with a layer of thin branches. The man who steps into this trap stumbles and crashes into the pit.

Friends, our eyes and hands can cause our hearts to be offended, to stumble. So Jesus tells us, don't let that happen. The Savior won't allow His followers to put band-aids on gangrene. He commands amputation. He tells us to take drastic, decisive action to get rid of habits or relationships that will bring ultimate destruction to our lives.

To paraphrase vv 29-30, "If your eye causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your eyes, then pluck out your eyes. In other words, don't look! Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and were now blind to the objects which previously caused you to sin. And if your hand causes you to sin, because temptation comes to you through the things you do, then cut off your hand. That is, don't do it! Behave as if you had actually cut off your hands, and were now crippled so that you could no longer do the things which previously caused you to sin (see John Stott).

Martin Luther once said, "It is impossible to keep the devil from shooting evil thoughts and lusts into your heart. But see to it that you do not let such arrows stick there and take root, but tear them out and throw them away." Luther continued, "Do what one of the ancient fathers counseled long ago: 'I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair or from biting my nose off.'"

Make the commitment Job made. Here's what he said in Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl (NIV)."

Is this kind of radical action really necessary? Yes, and here's why. Listen to Jesus' rationale in verse 29, "For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." There goes Jesus talking about hell again. And He says it twice, repeating Himself in verse 30. "For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."

2. *It's better to limp into heaven than leap into hell.*

The world doesn't buy that. The world tells us that purity is old fashioned, that we're missing out in life. And they're right, to a point. We are missing out. Sexual sin is sweet, for a few minutes. Then comes the pain that never ends.

The problem with lust is that it does not satisfy. It's like drinking salt water. The more you drink, the thirstier you get. You're never satisfied.

In Isaiah 55:2, God asks, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? And why do you labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

Do you want to experience true joy? Then listen to Jesus this morning. He's telling us what will *never* satisfy, what needs to be cut off and thrown away.

You say, "I've done that a hundred times. But I keep going back. What's missing?"

It could be several things, but let's start right here. *Putting off* is only half the solution. What's needed is to *put on*. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," says Paul in Romans 13:14, "and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

If you're a self-righteous Pharisee, you'll never do that. Oh, you'll put some rules in place to eliminate the act of adultery, but you'll never put on the Lord Jesus Christ. You don't see the need for that. You're just fine. You're a good person.

My friend, have you put on Christ? Have you asked Him to clean you up on the inside, to give you a new heart? Listen to His invitation, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28-29)."

But Jesus has more to say. In Matthew 5:27-32, Jesus calls on His followers to uphold the sanctity of marriage by confronting two foes of this important God-designed institution. One happens in the heart, as we've just seen. The other happens in the courtroom.

II. Jesus upholds the sanctity of marriage by showing the connection between adultery and the courtroom (31-32).

Five times in chapter 5 Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said," in verses 21, 27, 33, 38, and 43. But in verse 31 Jesus simply says, "It was also said." Why the change? I take it to mean that while He's moving to a different topic, the new topic is related to the previous one.

Lust leads to adultery. So does divorce. Lust destroys marriage. So does divorce.

In verses 31-32 Jesus addresses a very controversial subject. Divorce. Of course, it's not just controversial, but painful. For the husband and wife, for the children, for other family members and friends.

So divorce is not a subject you would bring up if you were preaching an evangelistic message, would you? Jesus did. His gospel addresses every area of our lives. Both here and in Matthew 19, He addresses the matter of divorce. First...

A. He cites accepted teaching (31). "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'"

Notice that statement, "It was also said." In a subject as sensitive as divorce, there will be lots of opinions being spoken. Jesus knows that. There were three perspectives of marriage that affected Jesus' audience, and ours too frankly.

First, there was the Greek view of marriage. The world of Jesus' day was highly influenced by Greek thinking. And history tells us that the Greeks had a very low view of women. Women were viewed by men as objects, as things. Because of this, relationships outside of marriage carried no stigma for the Greeks. Extra-marital relationships were the accepted and expected thing. They were accepted as natural and normal...for the man. Ironically, the Greek man demanded complete moral purity from his wife, yet for himself he demanded utmost immoral license.

It's also important to note for the Greeks, divorce required no legal process whatsoever. All a man had to do was to dismiss his wife in the presence of two witnesses. He also had to return her dowry intact. That was it.

Second, there was the Roman view of marriage. The history of the development of the marriage situation among the Romans is quite tragic. In the early days, the home was everything to the Romans. So high was the standard of Roman morality that for the first 500 years of the Roman commonwealth there was not one single recorded case of divorce. Then came the influence of the Greeks. By the second century BC, divorce became as common as marriage. Marriage became nothing more than an unfortunate necessity. A man had his wife for children, and his mistresses for pleasure.

Then thirdly, of course, there was the Jewish view of marriage. God had said in Malachi 2:16, "I hate divorce." So in the ideal world, the Jews opposed divorce. But in the real world, Jewish practice fell far short of this ideal.

There were two approaches to divorce by the Jews in Jesus' day. The two schools were divided over the interpretation of what God said in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes **because he has found some indecency in her**, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, ² and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, ³ and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance."

The controversy was over the words in verse 1, "some indecency" (AV, "some uncleanness"). There were two rabbinic schools of thought. There was the school of Shammai, the strict, severe approach. It said that this "indecency" meant adultery and unchastity, some sexual misdemeanor.

Then there was the school of Hillel, which was very liberal and broad-minded. They interpreted "indecency" in the widest possible way. They said that a man could divorce his wife if she went out in public with her head uncovered, if she was quarrelsome, or even if she put too much salt in his food, or burnt the meal. A certain Rabbi Akiba said that the phrase meant that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman that he considered to be more attractive.

Jesus quotes that verse, Deuteronomy 24:1, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." That's what was said. That's what *God* had said, at least in part. God had made it clear that while He hated divorce, He allowed it at times. And yet when it occurred, there had to be a legal certificate issued.

This of course was to protect the woman. In those days, men generally had a low view of women. But God didn't. Even in the Law of Moses He made it clear that no man could just tell his wife to get lost, which could mar her reputation and leave her quite vulnerable. Requiring a bill of divorce slowed things down. It didn't eliminate the pain, but it helped manage it.

So that's what was said. What did Jesus say?

B. He exposes what divorce does (32). "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Later in Matthew 19, Jesus again addresses the subject of divorce, in response to a question the Pharisees posed, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" In that situation, Jesus made it clear that the place to begin in our understanding of marriage is not the Moses' Law, but creation. He cites Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be ONE FLESH."

So from the beginning God intended marriage to be permanent. But man fell into sin. And sinful man lives in disobedience to God. And so, in Moses' day, God made a concession, for the temporary good of His people.

But in the sermon on the mount, Jesus looks at marriage from a slightly different perspective. In Matthew 19 He upholds the sanctity of marriage by looking at creation. In Matthew 5, He does the same thing by looking at a courtroom.

What happens when we miss God's intent for marriage, and divorce occurs? It causes problems in two ways, according to Jesus.

1. *It causes problems for the woman.* Verse 32, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery."

2. *It causes problems for another man.* He says at the end of verse 32, "And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Jesus is speaking very bluntly at this point. This is what happens. Keep in mind He's talking directly to the husband who divorces his wife without grounds. If a man did that in first century Israel, his ex-wife would most likely have to remarry as soon as possible, for it would be disgraceful and nearly impossible for her to live alone in that society. There was no social security, no child support laws, no alimony payments, to help her.

So sir, Jesus says to the man who does that, you are *making her commit adultery*. And furthermore, you are then causing another man to commit adultery, for this second marriage would contradict God's standard from creation. One man and one woman becoming one flesh, a union dissolvable only by the death of one party.

Is there a ground for divorce? Yes. Jesus does mention one exception. ESV, "Except on the ground of sexual immorality." AV, "except for the cause of fornication."

What does Jesus mean? There is difference of opinion over this word. Some feel it refers to unfaithfulness by a person in the Jewish betrothal period. In that case, a person would be justified in breaking the marriage contract which was yet to be fulfilled.

But the term is actually *pornea*, which appears throughout the NT and is a comprehensive term. It refers to "unchastity," that is, any act of sexual immorality, and it could happen before marriage, or while married.

Jesus seems to indicate that any act of sexual immorality violates the marriage bond by creating a competing sexual union in its place. When this happens, divorce becomes *permissible* because the marriage bed has been defiled.

I emphasize the word *permissible*, because God can restore things that are defiled. That's why Jesus came, and ultimately died as a sacrificial lamb on a cruel cross. To provide cleansing for defiled sinners, and then reconcile those repentant, defiled sinners to God, and to each other.

If we become preoccupied with the "grounds" for divorce, we are making ourselves guilty of the same Pharisaism that Jesus condemned. In contrast with the religious leaders who were preoccupied with the grounds for divorce (the schools of Shammai and Hillel), Jesus does three very positive things in this sermon.

First, He upholds the sanctity of marriage, and calls His people to do the same. Deal with your lust. Pluck out your eye if need be, but protect that marriage bond no matter what the cost.

And then secondly, should the marriage begin to deteriorate, He calls followers to be peacemakers. That's what He said at the beginning of this sermon, in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers." This is the course of blessing, to pursue reconciliation if at all possible.

And if not, then what? Thirdly, ask for grace. That's the invitation Jesus gives at the end of this sermon in Matthew 7:7, 11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you...¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it well, "Even adultery is not the unforgivable sin. It is a terrible sin, but God forbid that there should be anyone who feels that he or she has sinned himself or herself outside the love of God or outside His kingdom because of adultery. No; if you truly repent and realize the enormity of your sin and cast yourself upon the boundless love and mercy and grace of God, you can be forgiven and I assure you of pardon."⁴

Implications: Jesus calls us to uphold the sanctity of marriage.

Let's ask ourselves two vital questions as we close.

1. *What's going on in my heart?* And...
2. *What do I need to do with my eyes and hands this week?*

Closing Song: #430 "I Must Tell Jesus" all three verses

New Sign Dedication – After the service at approximately 11:45

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*Upholding the Sanctity of Marriage.*" Take time as a group to re-read this section from the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:27-32. How do we learn about Jesus' view of marriage from this?
2. According to Jesus' teaching in verse 28, how does lust work? What's the connection between the heart, the eyes, and adultery?
3. What radical action does Jesus say we should take to deal with temptation, according to verses 29-30? What does this mean practically? How can we help each other apply this instruction?
4. We live in a sex-crazed society. What will happen as we take Jesus' teaching in this passage to heart?
5. How does this passage prepare us to receive the hope of the gospel? After discussing, spend some time praying to the One who provides grace for those in need.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, p. 261.