

THE RED LETTER LECTURES

NOTES

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT Jesus' Teaching on Adultery and Divorce Matthew 5:27—32

I. Adultery

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’
— Mt. 5:27*

A. *You have heard that it was said . . .*

1. Jesus continues His appeal to the moral law from the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:1-17).
2. Jesus talked about murder, now adultery. Why this emphasis as an early teaching? See *Prov. 6:34-35*.

B. *Do not commit adultery.*

1. Prohibition of adultery is the 6th commandment of the Law. See *Exo. 20:14*.
2. Adultery is best defined as an unfaithful sexual act outside of marriage. See *Heb. 13:4*.
3. Adultery is also used as a figure of speech referring to Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Often referred to as a harlot.
4. Is God a killjoy, that is, a person who spoils the joy or pleasure of others; a spoilsport?
See *Margin from C.S. Lewis*.

*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her in his heart
— Mt. 5:28.*

A. *anyone who looks at a woman lustfully . . .*

1. In the Rabbinic tradition Jesus expands the understanding of the commandment.

Prov. 6:34-35: for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.

Exo. 20:14: You shall not commit adultery.

Heb. 13:4: Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Morality from C.S. Lewis. A schoolboy was asked what he thought God was like. He responded, that, as far as he could make out, God was, "The sort of person who is always snooping round to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it." And I am afraid that is the sort of idea that the word Morality raises in a good many people's minds: something that interferes, something that stops you having a good time. In reality moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, the running of that machine. *Mere Christianity*, p. 69-71

2. Lit., "looking at a woman toward the desire of her."
 - a. Abnormal desire. Not simply attraction to beauty but a sensual longing after.
 - b. The word is *epithumeo*; *epi (upon) + thumos (the mind)*. See *Jas. 1:13-15*.
3. What is our best defense? See *1 Cor. 6:18-20; 1 Cor. 10:13*.

If your right eye causes you to sin, **GOUGE IT OUT* and THROW IT AWAY***. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, **CUT IT OFF* and THROW IT AWAY*** It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
— Mt. 5:29-30

- A. Gouge it out . . . throw it away . . . cut it off . . . throw it away.
 1. These are all Imperative Commands.
 2. Literal or figurative? Why is the Lord defining the magnitude of the problem in such graphic terms?
 3. If literal then the Lord is advocating the physical maiming of the body. Not likely.
 4. If figurative, our Lord is using a strong hyperbole to make a point.
 5. Adultery is a serious issue that breaks apart marriages and has deep consequences, both temporal and eternal.
 6. Adultery can send a person to hell. See *1 Cor. 6:9-10*.

II. Divorce

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. — Mt. 5:31-32

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Jas. 1:13-15: When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

1 Cor. 6:18-20: Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Cor. 10:13: No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Cor. 6:9-10: Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

A. *certificate of divorce . . .*

1. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).
2. God allows divorce only on the basis of unfaithfulness. See Dt. 24:1-4; Mt. 19:7.
3. Jesus, declared that divorce would not be necessary if our hearts were not hardened.
4. Certificate of divorce required, issued by the priests (probably High Priest).

B. *But I tell you . . .*

1. Jesus takes a portion of the Law and expounds on the true understanding of God's intent.
2. The letter of the Law and the spirit of the Law. See 2 Cor. 3:6
3. Is Jesus adding to the Law or explaining the full intent of the Law?
 - a. "You've heard that you should not commit the act of murder, but I say to you it starts before that."
 - b. "You've heard that you should not commit the act of adultery, but I say to you it begins with lust."
 - c. "You've heard that the Law says, you may give a divorce certificate, but it is only because your hearts are hardened."

C. *except for marital unfaithfulness . . .*

1. Lit., "except of word of fornication." The word used is *porneia*, which means to commit fornication or any sexual sin. See Boice, pp. 116-122.
2. If the woman, in this case, is declared unclean she can be given a certificate of divorce.
3. Is the man exempt from these instructions? Why not?

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Dt. 24:1-4: If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent (sexual uncleanness) about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled (through illicit sexual acts or harlotry).

Mt. 19:7: "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

2 Cor. 3:6: He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

D. *causes her to become an adulteress . . .*

1. "He causes her to commit adultery." Word is *moichao*.
2. If the woman isn't guilty and given a certificate of divorce, she now carries the stigma of being an adulteress in the eyes of others.
3. Because unfaithfulness (*porneia*) is the only exception, the woman is still legally married in God's sight.
4. Man is guilty of lying—bearing false witness, and taking the name of the Lord in vain as he would have had to make a sworn statement.

III. Marriage and Divorce in the New Testament

- A. Does a woman or man who commits adultery, gets a divorce and remarries, considered to be an adulterer for life? See *Lk. 16:18*.
- B. Does God forgive the repentant? See *1 Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 8:1*.
- C. What about believers/unbelievers in a marriage? Should they divorce? Can they? See *1 Cor. 7:12-15*.
- D. Marriage is a type of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church. READ *Eph. 5:21-32*.
 1. The husband represents Christ. The wife represents the Church.
 2. Christ is married to His church forever. Jesus never divorces His church. READ *Heb. 13:5*.

IV. Commandments in this section of study.

- A. **GOUGE IT OUT**
- B. **CUT IT OFF**
- C. **THROW IT AWAY (2)**

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Lk. 16:18: Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

1 Cor. 6:9-11: Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ***And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

Rom. 8:1-2: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

1 Cor. 7:12-15: To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. ¹⁶ How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?