



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Spirit of Marital Fidelity

MATTHEW 5.27-32

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Few of us have been spared the difficulties that accompany divorce. Perhaps you have been through the devastation of a broken marriage yourself. Maybe you have lived through the painful experiences of divorce in your immediate family. You may currently be trying to encourage a close friend whose marriage is 'on the rocks.' Divorce puts individuals, families, and society, as a whole, under tremendous strain.

Jesus continues His introduction to the laws which will rule His coming kingdom by contrasting what had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees with His interpretation of the laws regarding adultery and divorce. Rigid standards regarding adultery were in place enforcing the letter of the law. Jesus reorients His listeners to the spirit of the law prohibiting adultery with a call to marital fidelity.

Matthew 5.27-32—“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. ‘Furthermore, it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”

Jesus taught that the perfect standard of righteousness went far beyond restraining oneself from shedding innocent blood. It went beyond to encourage us to abandon rancor and pursue reconciliation. Now He moves from the sixth to the seventh commandment to consider the prohibition against adultery. True righteousness demands more than merely restraining ourselves from destroying our own marriage or that of another through infidelity. It calls us to the highest view of the commitment undertaken in marriage.

I. EXPOSE THE ROOT OF ADULTERY (27-28)

Visualization techniques fill the pages of self-help books on leadership, goal setting, and personal success. We see things first in our mind's eye and then take action to make what we have imagined come to pass. There is a real power to what we mull over in our minds. Fantasizing about illicit relations can set you up for failure when temptations come. Temptation could be viewed as an opportunity to act on hidden desires...things about which we have fantasized in the past.

“But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Jesus equates fantasizing about adultery with the act itself. He does not mean to say that the consequences are the same. He wants us to see both as absolutely contrary to God's intent for committed married love. Each violates the spirit of marital fidelity. And while lustful thoughts may seem harmless enough when the temptation beckons, they give rise to adultery in the same way that anger leads to rage and ultimately to murder.

II. CUT OFF PROVISIONS FOR INFIDELITY (29-30)

Plucking out your eye and cutting off your hand are instructions that few of us are likely to put into practice. Obviously, Jesus was using a rhetorical device called hyperbole, common to both His time and ours to drive home a point. It would be of more advantage to lose your sight or the use of your right hand in this life and escape future judgment, than to enjoy 20/20 vision and ambidexterity in this life and eventually face eternal judgment.

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you...

BIBLE STUDIES

SENATE MEMBERS: TUESDAY AT 7:30AM IN CAP 1E.9

HOUSE MEMBERS: WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER)

CAPITOL STAFF STUDY: THURSDAY LUNCH @ NOON IN SAM HOUSTON BUILDING, ROOM 210

Texas

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Jesus Christ did not establish a practice here that would produce a kingdom of loyal subjects who were blind and maimed. He simply wanted us to appreciate the real destruction of lust and adultery. Lust strikes directly at the root of the spirit of marital fidelity. You cannot cherish the idea of illicit relations with someone that is not your spouse and maintain the spirit of your marriage at the same time.

Marital breakup is a protracted process made up of countless acts of the will that are contrary to the commitment made in marriage. These acts of the will seem so insignificant in the moment they are made. Lustful thoughts, which seem so harmless, slowly loosen bonds of marriage.

III. HONOR THE COMMITMENT OF MARRIAGE (31-32)

“It has been said...but I say to you” introduces another of the standards of true righteousness in His heavenly kingdom. The matter addressed here is distinguished from adultery, but directly related to it. While adultery constitutes a grave threat to enjoying God’s highest and best for marriage, a lack of commitment is truly the greatest threat of all.

Divorce is the term we use to speak of the legal dissolution of a marriage contract. As prevalent as it is in our culture, it may have been more prevalent in the New Testament era. Unlike today, then divorce almost always involved the husband putting out the wife. The wife was too dependent on the husband in most cases to allow divorce to be a consideration for her. And if she had the economic resources to give her freedom to initiate the divorce, she would be ostracized for doing so.

Furthermore, it has been said...but I say to you...

The Shammai school of Jewish interpretation held strictly to adultery as the only legal grounds for granting a written certificate of divorce. Yet according to the Hillel school of

interpretation, grounds for divorce could be found in almost anything the husband found offensive or disagreeable in his wife. Jesus attacks the cavalier attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees toward the marriage covenant. He also exposes their part in facilitating a culture in which a man was casually excused from honoring his obligations to his wife and family.

If a woman had committed adultery, thereby breaking the marriage covenant, there was a legal provision (though not a requirement) for her husband to divorce her. But if the husband divorced his wife for reasons other than adultery, he put her under the stigma of adultery before the community as though she was guilty of it. It follows that any man who married the divorced woman would bear the stigma as well.

When piecing these words together with the teaching of Jesus throughout the gospels, we realize that He is calling us to God’s original ideal for the institution of marriage. He makes no attempt to legislate on the technical challenges of divorce proceedings. The scribes granted many a written certificate of divorce allowing a man to put out his wife without due cause. Jesus teaches us that such a distortion of the spirit of marital fidelity in no way absolved that man of his responsibility before God.

CONCLUSION

Do you excuse lustful thoughts as harmless? Will you consider lustful thoughts in light of God’s ideal for married love? Have you considered how your spouse would feel if your secret fantasies were revealed to them?

Are you making provision for sin by things you watch or allow before your eyes? Are there relationships in your life that are flirtatious and could expose you to temptations you are not able to handle? Are you accountable to others for your commitment to moral purity?

Are you dedicated to God’s highest ideals for the marriage covenant or are you simply hoping to avoid an extramarital affair or a painful divorce?