



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from May 9 afternoon through May 16 morning

The Sermon on the Mount, Week 4

Matthew 5:27-32

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 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. 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. 'It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 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."

Jesus had dealt with anger and murder, and then he addressed lust, adultery and divorce. Again, he pointed to the Mosaic Law as he referenced Exodus 20:14 (and Deuteronomy 5:18). And again, he followed this with, "But I say to you ..." (v. 28). Regarding the sin of adultery, Jesus said this sin is not just the physical act of having a sexual encounter with someone other than one's spouse, but the intent of the heart. Lust is defined as a selfish desire or longing, and in this case it means a man's desire or longing to have a sexual experience with a woman who is not his wife. Jesus directed this teaching to men, and there are two possible reasons. First, men are known to be more visual and sexual in nature (generally speaking) and are therefore more likely to face the temptation to commit the sin of lust (which Jesus equates with adultery). Second, the culture of this time was patriarchal in nature and men would be more likely to use their position in this society to ignore, hide or excuse their sin against a woman. Those in positions of power are often tempted to justify their sins.

Jesus taught that the sin of lust is to be taken seriously. In addition to equating it with adultery, he said that men must go to any lengths necessary to remove this sin from their lives. He used the extreme examples of removing an eye or hand, but Bible scholars are quick to point out that Jesus was not advocating for physical mutilation. Instead, he was using exaggeration to point out that one must be willing to sacrifice something in life that leads to sin. Another interpretation is:

Jesus was advocating the removal of the inward cause of offense. Since a lustful heart would ultimately lead to adultery, one's heart must be changed. Only by such a change of heart can one escape hell ("Gehenna"; cf. v. 22).

Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 31.

Surrender seems to be the key here. When a person confesses that Jesus is Lord and surrenders to him, that person then pursues obedience to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within and is willing to sever ties with anything that leads to sin. An unwillingness to do so might be an indication that confession was not sincere and surrender did not truly take place.

Jesus then addressed divorce by referencing Deuteronomy 24:1, which indicates there is an allowance for a man to divorce his wife. This is addressed to men because in this patriarchal culture it was the man who would initiate such an action. This verse in Deuteronomy states that divorce is allowed when a man's wife "finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her." Because the penalty for premarital sex and adultery was death, this must have referred to some other "indecency." However, given that Malachi 2:16 speaks directly against divorce, this "indecency" would have been an issue of great significance and not merely an arbitrary dislike of something in her life. If a man did divorce his wife, she was allowed to remarry, but if her second marriage ended through divorce or the death of the second husband, she was not allowed to remarry her first husband. Historians point out that divorce was a common occurrence in most cultures during the time period of the Old Testament and Bible scholars believe this law regarding divorce was meant to elevate the view of marital commitment and provide a deterrent to divorce.

After pointing out this law in Deuteronomy, Jesus further elevated the view of commitment to the marriage relationship. He said a man could only divorce his wife if she had committed sexual immorality, and to do so for any other reason would "make her commit adultery." He then taught that a man who married a divorced woman commits adultery. The point of his teaching is that God has created the marriage relationship to be between one man and one woman for a lifetime. While the Mosaic Law did allow for divorce, that allowance was mostly meant to be a deterrent and Jesus strengthened this deterrent with his teaching. A man was not to search for reasons to divorce his wife, but rather was to maintain a strong commitment to her unless she was unfaithful to him. The seriousness of divorce is seen in the consequences; if his former wife chose to marry again, both she and her new husband would be living in the sin of adultery.

Note: in our culture, divorce and remarriage has become commonplace. Recent statistics show that divorce rates among younger people have dropped, but this is mainly due to the increasing number of people who choose not to marry. For those of us who follow Jesus, we must embrace the truth that marriage is for a lifetime. There are circumstances in which divorce is the right

course of action, especially when the marriage puts the husband or wife at risk of harm. Also, there are situations wherein one party in the marriage forces divorce on the other. Regardless of the circumstances, marriage must be taken seriously and divorce must be a last resort. This is not meant to add pain to those who already have experienced a divorce. For those who have, there is healing, and this teaching should serve as a guide for the future.

In addition to the Scriptures in Matthew and Deuteronomy referenced above, this week's reading also consisted of these passages, which may be helpful for some of the discussion questions:

- Proverbs 6:20-35 (warnings against adultery and sexual temptation, consequences for adultery)
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-16 (Paul's teaching about singleness, marriage and divorce)
- 2 Samuel 11:1-26, 2 Samuel 12:1-15 (record of David's sin of adultery against God, Bathsheba and Uriah)
- Matthew 19:1-9 (Jesus' teachings about marriage and divorce, similar to Matthew 5:31-32)
- Ephesians 5:22-33 (Paul's teaching to married couples)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (Paul's teaching about sanctification, sexual immorality and self control)

Discussion Questions

1. Our culture is one that seems to have a strong focus on sexuality. Entertainment, advertising, fashion and other aspects of our culture attempt to use sex to get their messages across. How do we as believers navigate a culture like this and seek to keep our focus on Christ?
2. In your own words, how would you describe God's design for marriage and sexuality? What Scriptures have helped you form this perspective?
3. What are some practical things we can do to invest in and strengthen our marriage relationships?
4. What lessons can we learn and apply from David's sins recorded in 2 Samuel 11-12?
5. How have you seen God's grace at work in a broken marriage relationship that resulted in reconciliation? How have you seen His grace at work even when the result was not reconciliation?
6. Moving forward, how can the body of Christ disciple people to create strong marriage relationships that stand the tests of time and temptation?