



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Perfect Righteousness (Part 2)

Matthew 5:27-32

Contrast #2: Sexual Sin (verses 27-30)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 33)
2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 34-37)

Contrast #3: Marriage Policy (verses 31-32)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 33)
2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 34-37)

Before we begin to look at Matthew 5:27-32 this morning, we need to remind ourselves the context in which Jesus spoke these words. Jesus is building a case for the righteousness that God requires for anyone to enter the kingdom of heaven. He begins this section by stating clearly that if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, you need to have a righteousness that is greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20). He ends this section by calling you to a perfect righteousness, which is like your heavenly Father (verse 48).

Jesus builds His case by contrasting the teaching of the Pharisees with His own teaching. Last week, we looked at the first contrast: Animosity (verses 21-26) in which Jesus put forth the Pharisee's view regarding murder and contrasted it with His own teaching regarding animosity in the heart. This morning, we will look at two more contrasts which Jesus will put forth.

Contrast #2 is found in verses 27-30. Contrast #3 is found in verses 31 and 32. With each contrast, we will have two points: (1) The teaching of the Pharisees (2) The teaching of Jesus. These points are in accordance with the "You have heard, ... But I say to you, ..." pattern that is found throughout this entire section of the Sermon on the Mount. Let us first read the passage before us.

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 on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. "And it was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for [the] cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Contrast #2: Sexual Sin (verses 27-30)

Let's begin with ...

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 27)

The Pharisees taught, with regard to adultery, "Do not commit adultery. Like our first contrast, this teaching was taken directly from the Ten Commandments. It is often called, "the 7th commandment." It is found in Ex. 20:14. In this commandment, God prohibited those who were married to have any sexual involvement with anyone else, other than their spouse. This was simple, direct and clear. If you are married, you need to remain faithful to your spouse.

Now, what was wrong with this teaching? Nothing. Again, like last week, the Pharisees were not teaching error in these words. The difficulty of the teaching of the Pharisees isn't so much in what they said, as much in what they didn't say. For the most part, the Pharisees simply let this teaching stop right where I have left it. They prohibited those who were married from having any sexual involvement with others. They taught that as long as you didn't commit the actual act of adultery, you were fine according to the standards of the law.

Again, like last week, we will see Jesus pressing His case far beyond the technicalities of the external law.

Let's look at ...

2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 28-30)

Jesus said, "everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (verse 28). While the Pharisees of Jesus day would stop at the 7th commandment, Jesus continued on to the 10th commandment, which said, "You shall not covet your neighbor's ... wife" (Exodus 20:17). What is coveting, but desiring in your heart to have something that doesn't belong to you? This is exactly what is meant by the word, "lust." Lust is simply an earnest desire for something that you do not have. In this case, it is your neighbor's wife.

So, we know that Jesus' teaching here is nothing new. It isn't like Jesus put forth something that should have been totally foreign to the scribes and Pharisees. This is entirely consistent with the teaching of the law, which was given through Moses. Jesus' teaching here is essentially an implication from the two greatest commandments, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself (see Matthew 22:37-40). To love God will mean that you will seek purity in all things. In this case, sexually. To love your neighbor will mean that you will seek the best for those around you. You will seek the sexual purity of others and you will respect the possessions of others.

This wasn't even new to Job, who probably lived sometime before the time of Abraham, at least 400 years before the law. He understood this sin of the heart. He said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). The idea here with Job is exactly the same as what Jesus is talking about. Jesus is describing the lingering gaze at a woman, accompanied by associated thoughts in the mind, with earnest sexual desire for that woman, ... "everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her."

Jesus doesn't say that you cannot look at a woman, as if women ought to be covered up, from head to toe, which is practiced in the Middle-East today. Jesus is talking here about a lingering look -- a look with a purpose, "to lust for her."

This was David's problem, in 2 Samuel 11:2, "When evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing." At that point, David should have turned around and walked back in his house and thought nothing of it. But the next phrase tells us of David's problem, "... and the woman was very beautiful in appearance." Apparently, David's look was enough to make a judgment upon Bathsheba's beauty. And many of you know what happened. David called for her, took her, and lay with her (2 Sam. 11:4). David became an adulterer.

You would be correct to say that David's lingering look upon Bathsheba was the first step in him committing adultery. This is always how sin works. It is a process. It doesn't just "happen." There are things that lead up to it. Last week we discovered that animosity develops into verbal arguments, which develops into physical fighting, which develops into the act of murder. With regards to adultery, it is the look which begins the whole process. The look develops into a thought, which develops into action, which develops into adultery. **Murder is the culmination of animosity. Adultery is the culmination of the lustful look.** James, the brother of our Lord, described this process when he wrote, "each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

I remember in college being around some friends of mine, who thought that it was permissible to look lustfully at other women, as long as you never were involved sexually. They would say something, "I can window shop. I just can't purchase anything." But notice what Jesus says are the consequences of such a lingering look, "[this man] ... has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (verse 28). Though the lingering look may actually lead to physical adultery, Jesus says that the lingering look is actually committing adultery already. You might call this, "heart adultery."

Whereas the Jews would want to keep one's righteousness merely in the external realm, Jesus presses the righteousness that you need to enter the kingdom of heaven deep into the heart. Jesus says that you can commit adultery in your heart, without ever physically doing anything. Noticed that Jesus doesn't say that this is on the path to committing adultery. Rather, he has already committed adultery in his heart. It is a done deal. It is a past occurrence.

Like last week, Jesus is seeking to properly define what sexual sin is. He is getting at the root of the issue. The Pharisees were content in leaving the standard of righteousness necessary to please God here at the outward act of adultery. But Jesus goes to the root and says that any thought of adultery in the heart is wrong and puts you as guilty before God. Such is the standard of righteousness to which God calls us to enter into His kingdom.

Don't attempt to strictly define Jesus' words here. Jesus said, "everyone who **looks** on a woman to lust for her." Don't reason to yourself, "I don't look at pictures, I just read about it in my romance novels. Jesus merely prohibited the look, but I can read about it all that I want." Or don't say, "I don't look at other women. I just think about them. I haven't been guilty of Jesus' words." Or don't say, "first I look, but not lustfully. Then, I ponder the things in my heart afterwards, but never while I am looking." This is catching the letter of Jesus' words, but missing the spirit.

Furthermore, I don't believe that Jesus is speaking only to married men. Technically, adultery can only be committed by those who are married, who leave their spouse. So don't say, "Hey, I'm not married, so I can sexually lust after other women however I want." Rather, you ought to apply Jesus' words to every kind of inappropriate sexual activity.

It must be admitted that Jesus is primarily addressing men in this instance, but that, in no means, limits the applications of these words. If you catch the spirit of what Jesus is saying here, you will find out that it will have all sorts of applications to the women as well. Women can dress inappropriately, and attract the eyes of men, which is nothing less than being an accomplice in the sin. Women can fantasize about other men just as well as men can. The existence of Playgirl magazine demonstrates this fact. Perhaps the men are more easily led astray with visual aids like Playboy magazine to fantasize, but the harlequin romance is essentially the same thing.

Let's stop at this point and ponder the weight of what Jesus is saying here. He is saying that if you think adultery in the mind, you have committed adultery in the heart. Which of you are innocent of this? Which of you have ever wished you were married to another? Which of you have ever had an inappropriate sexual thought or desire? Perhaps some of the children, here, who have not yet reached puberty are innocent of this, and don't yet have the physical desires within them yet. But I would contend that we all would admit to some level of this sin in our hearts.

We live in an age today where this is easier and easier and easier to commit this sin. There are more temptations today than ever. We live in a media-driven society. For a few dollars you can purchase a magazine, which is filled with pictures, which will entice you to sin in this way. For a few dollars you can go down to a video store and rent a video which is filled with enticements in this area. For \$20/month, you can bring the

internet into your home, and have access to millions of inappropriate pictures. For \$30/month, you can bring cable television into your home, which broadcasts ungodly movies 24 hours a day.

If you think that this is all, it isn't. Take a drive down State street, and you can see suggestive billboards. Look in the Rockford Register Star, and you can see advertisements, which are nothing less than pornography. Look on the major networks, and you will find inappropriate sexual material all over the place. If you don't believe me, watch a sit-com some time and watch how many of the jokes are sexual in nature. Watch a few of the commercials and you will discover the truth of what I say.

Why is this all over our media today? The television stations and the advertisers are smart. They know the attraction that this has. They know that sex sells. They know that it works to put a beautiful woman driving a car in attempts to sell it.

So what should be done? Shall we refuse to purchase our local paper? Shall we boycott the video stores? Shall we throw out our televisions? Shall we throw away our computers? Shall we boycott the internet? Shall we get involved politically to reduce the sexual content of our media? None of these "solutions" will solve this problem. These are simply modern inventions which have been used to increase the availability and visibility of sexually inappropriate behavior. To rid ourselves of these things won't solve our problem.

The society in which Jesus lived experienced this problem, and they had none of the modern media tools that we have today. You need to realize that this wickedness flows from the heart. Do you think that the monk, who cloistered away from society in a far-away desert, dedicating himself to a life of poverty, scripture-reading, prayer and religious ritual, has conquered this problem? The monk, who has tried to get away from all worldly temptations, has not yet escaped from his own heart. The sexual scandals of recent days within the Roman Catholic Church have demonstrated this that the most holy, dedicated men (externally, at least) have not yet escaped the wickedness of their own hearts. It is from the heart that these things flow. The scripture most plainly and boldly asserts, "ever intent of the thoughts of the heart are only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Jeremiah also testified that "the heart of a man is desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9).

Jesus stated clearly in Mark 7:21 that "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ..." You will escape the temptation of adultery in your heart when you escape from your heart, which obviously is impossible. It cannot be done, because wickedness flows from the heart.

Again, I ask you, which of you are innocent of this? Do you realize that every single one of us, (who has been guilty of this), is an adulterer in God's eyes? I don't know how you can come to any other conclusion than what Jesus has said, "everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (verse 28). This ought to humble you. This ought to make you realize that you will never come before God based upon your works of righteousness before God. When you see God's standard of righteousness, you will quickly realize that you stand before God as a sinner.

Paul wrote in Rom. 3:19, "Whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God." Jesus' teaching ought to shut our mouths of claiming to be righteous before God. We ought to realize that we will never stand before God as righteous because of our own righteousness. This is Jesus' main point. He spoke these things to break the scribes and the Pharisees and to break us. Jesus said that you need to be better than the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20). Jesus said that deep in your heart, you need to be perfect, like God (verse 48). Anything else does not qualify you for entrance into the kingdom of God.

Again, we need to come back to verse 17 for our hope in this desperate situation. In this verse Jesus said that He came to fulfil the law. By faith, we can have the righteousness of Jesus, which we so desperately need. This is the good news of the gospel. The good news is that Jesus became sin for us. The good news is that Jesus was righteous for us. He took our sin and gave us His righteousness. So, when we stand before God as guilty, by faith, we can be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. If you have never believed this, I plead with you to confess your sin before God and call upon Jesus for forgiveness of your sin.

So what should be done? Let's look at what Jesus says we should do, in **verses 29 and 30**, "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell."

Notice that these verses are almost identical. There are really only three differences....

1. The subject of verse 29 is your "eye," while the subject of verse 30 is your "hand."
2. In verse 29, Jesus instructs us to "tear out" our eye, while in verse 30, Jesus instructs us to "cut off" our hand.
3. There are very minor differences in word order in these verses.

Other than those three minor differences, Jesus repeats His thought. Whenever thoughts in Scripture are repeated, it is for emphasis. I believe that Jesus here is emphasizing the seriousness of sexual sin, for which we need to ...

1. Take drastic action against this sin.

Jesus' said that drastic action was necessary to solve your lust problem. Jesus said, "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; ... And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you;" This sounds pretty drastic to me. Now the implication is that you should do these things if they will solve your problem. However, once you remove your right eye, your left eye will probably find a way to lust double to keep up with what was lost. Also, once you remove your right hand, your left hand will figure out how to fill the void.

I don't think that Jesus is speaking literally here that we ought to do this. Because the problem is in our heart, not in our hands or in our eyes. Pluck both of your eyes and you will still have a problem with this. If you don't believe me, just ask a blind man if he ever deals with sexual lust in his heart. Cut off both of your hands, and you will still have this problem, because you still will have a wicked heart.

However, I do think that Jesus is instructing us to take drastic action. Those areas of your life that are causing you difficulty, remove them. Take them away. If your television is causing you to commit adultery in your heart, take a shovel, go outside, dig a hole, throw your television into the hole, cover it up, and have no regrets. If your sports magazine has advertisements in it which cause you to stumble, end your subscription or have your wife preview the magazine and cut out every bad picture in the magazine. If there are issues at your job, which are causing you or others to stumble in this area, quit your job.

You tell me, which is better, to have a television now and suffer in hell for eternity or to have no television and enjoy God's presence in heaven? Which is better, to have a sports magazine now and suffer in hell for eternity or to have no sports magazine and enjoy God's presence in heaven? Which is better, to have a good job now and suffer in hell for eternity, or to have a lesser job now and enjoy God's presence in heaven for all eternity?

You say, "But Steve, these things are too radical for me to do. I can't give up my television. I can't give up my magazines. I can't give up my job." If Jesus says, "tear out your eye" or "cut off your hand," I don't think that any of these options are too difficult for you. These are small actions compared to what Jesus demands. Besides, I know people who have done each of these in an effort to distance themselves from the sexual temptations that may come as a result of them. I know a man who dug a hole for his television. I know a man who has his wife edit his sports magazine before he ever sees it. I know a man who quit his job to distance himself from sexually explicit temptations.

I'm not saying that television or magazines are wrong to have, especially if you use them properly. Here is what I am saying, "If they lure you to lust for a woman," they are wrong and ought to get rid of them.

Secondly, we need to ...

2. Realize how serious this sin is.

Sexual sin is a damning sin. In other words, if you don't deal with it, it is sufficient to send you to hell if you don't fight it. Is that not the implication of these two verses? If your eye or your hand causes you to sin, and you don't deal with it, these members of your body will require your "whole body" to be thrown into hell, where there is no escape. Jesus says that your eyes and your hands can be like ropes or chains that are attached to your whole body, which are pulling you down into hell. If this is the case, we need to deal with those things pulling us down, or we will end up in hell.

The repetition in verses 29 and 30 further emphasize how serious this sin is. Jesus is instructing us not to take this sin lightly. Some might say, "Oh, I can have my pornography and be O.K." You can't. Some else might say, "there is nothing wrong with gazing at bill board in my car. Nobody can see me." Listen, you may hide it from me. You may hide it from your spouse. But you will never hide your lusts from God. Everything that the Pharisees tried to do was to make them feel smug in their law keeping. Those who say, "I'm not committing adultery. My pornography is fine, because I keep it to myself." God says, "No." If you hold on to this, it will send you to hell.

If you realize how serious this sin is, you will take drastic action. I read this week of a man named Donald Wyman, worked for a mining company, Original Fuels. On Tuesday, July 20 1993, he was clearing land when a large tree fell on him, breaking his shin and pinning him to the ground. For an hour, he screamed for help, but nobody heard him. Realizing the seriousness of his situation, he took a shoestring and made a tourniquet on his leg and tightened it with a wrench. He "took out his pocket knife and cut through the skin, muscle and broken bone below his left knee. He crawled 30 yards over loose ground to a bulldozer, drove a quarter mile to his truck, and then maneuvered the standard transmission with his good leg and a hand until he reached a farmer's home one and a half miles away" (AP news). John Huber, the farmer who lived in this home, drove him to the nearby hospital. Donald Wyman survived because he realized the seriousness of his situation and the drastic action necessary to save his life.

The sad thing is that many don't realize the severity of refusing to battle sexual sin. Church family it is your eternal soul that is at stake! Peter tell us to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Sexual sin is one of the fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. **Sin is to the soul what cancer is to the body.** Yet, few realize how true this is.

We readily fight cancer when it comes upon us. Some of the most feared words in our society today are when a doctor says to you, "your tumor was malignant. You have cancer." When we hear these words, our actions demonstrate that we treat them very seriously. There are some ladies here in our congregation who have entirely changed their life style based upon a doctor's diagnosis of breast cancer. But, we treat sin lightly. When people are told, "you are a sinner and under the wrath of God," they often aren't alarmed by it.

The one who will enter God's kingdom, will recognize this war and will fight it and battle it to its end. Remember, we will always have this battle, as long as we have our wicked hearts. As long as you are in the flesh, the battle will continue. But it is a battle we must fight. John Piper wrote, "The evidence of justifying faith is that it fights lust. Jesus didn't say that lust would entirely vanish. He said that the evidence of being heaven-bound is that we gouge out our eye rather than settle for a pattern of lust" (Future Grace, p. 332-333).

The scribes and Pharisees were content to claim that they weren't adulterers, simply because they didn't commit external adultery. As a result, the scribes and Pharisees could say that they were blameless with respect to the law. But Jesus presses the issue to the heart and exposes their sin. One of the ways in which the scribes and Pharisees sought to justify themselves and others in their adultery was by making divorce easy. If you make divorce and remarriage easy, you can legitimize your sexual lust. This is exactly what the scribes and Pharisees had done, which leads us to our third contrast.

Let's look at ...

Contrast #3: Marriage Policy (verses 31-32)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 31)

Jesus said (in **verse 31**), "And it was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';" Once again, we find Jesus quoting from the Old Testament to describe the position of the scribes and the Pharisees with respect to their marriage (and re-marriage) policy. Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 24, where Moses set forth what should take place when a man and a woman are divorced from each other. This was the main text to which the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day would turn to discuss matters of divorce (and remarriage).

In Deuteronomy 24 Moses described the situation of a man, who was divorced and remarried. He was prohibited from returning to his first wife. The verse Jesus quotes is from Deuteronomy 24:3, where the man who is divorcing his wife gives to her a certificate of divorce. As with much of the law, the writing of this certificate of divorce was primarily done to protect the women who were divorced in that society. Rather than sending her away to the streets empty-handed, she had a piece of paper that would give her freedom from the yoke of her husband. Furthermore, this certificate would clearly explain the reason why she was being divorced. It was for her protection. Yet, the Pharisees took what Moses said in Deuteronomy 24 and twisted it for their own purposes.

Let me show you how they did this. Turn over to Matthew 19. Matthew describes for us what happened when Jesus came into the same region where John the Baptist had been ministering. You remember that John the Baptist was beheaded because he spoke out about the adultery of Herod, who had seduced his brother's wife and had taken her as his own. John preached that this wasn't lawful for him to have her as his wife (Matthew 14). In this text we see the Pharisees coming to test Jesus with respect to His views on divorce. I am sure that they also would like for Him to have conflicts with Herod. Perhaps Herod would have Jesus killed, so that they didn't have to do it themselves.

Matthew 19:3, "And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?'"

Hillel, the Rabbi, who had died when Jesus was a teenager, had taught that you could divorce your wife for any reason whatsoever. He simply taught, that when you did so, you needed to write out this certificate of divorce. When I say any reason, I mean, "any reason." For example, a man could divorce his wife for trivial things like spoiling his food (burning it or over-salting it), or finding another woman more beautiful than she (see John Gill's Commentary on Matt. 5:31 for detailed Jewish references). For instance, Josephus divorced his wife, because he was "not pleased with her manners [or behavior]" (Autobiography, paragraph 76). The people loved this teaching. You could divorce for any time for whatever cause at all. Just make sure to write a certificate of divorce. They could marry and divorce and marry and divorce, whatever meets their fancy.

This sounds like today doesn't it? We have "no fault" divorce today. We have internet lawyers waiting to help you get a divorce. I took out my Yellow Pages and found more than thirty law-offices advertising their divorce services in the Rockford/Belvidere area alone. It has become pandemic. This is illustrated by the joke that is told of the divorced couple in Hollywood, who were married again, because the divorce simply wasn't working out.

Nearly 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Our society today, is just like it was in Jesus' day. Perhaps it is worse. Just as people normally go to a church to get married, today, churches are developing rituals for divorces to take place in the church, where the officiating minister is to say, "This ceremony marks the end of a long and intense relationship ... perhaps neither as long nor as intense as some might wish. ... Paths must part. And the journey necessarily requires ends in this solemn, courageous -- and hopeful -- time of divorce" (quoted by Marvin Olasky, "Religious Cellophane, World Magazine, June 9, 2001).

Jesus responds to this question of the Pharisees by quoting from Genesis, chapters 1 and 2. Matthew 19:4-6, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Jesus' response was simply setting forth what God had always intended for marriage. **From the beginning, God had designed marriage to be one man for one woman for life.** When two come together in the marriage, they are to be considered as one flesh. God has joined them together. Don't go about separating them! When two things are glued together, they are not to be torn apart again.

These self-righteous Pharisees said in verse 7, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY?"

First of all, **Moses never commanded** that anybody divorce anybody. God simply recognized, that sinful man will have hardened hearts. If a society says that you cannot divorce your wife, terrible injustices to women will occur, because of the sinfulness of man's heart. Remember King Henry VII? When told that he couldn't divorce his wife, he simply killed them. In such a society women will simply be abandoned to the streets (or something). This is what the law of Moses was seeking to protect in Deuteronomy 24. This certificate would help to protect the women who were divorced. This is precisely Jesus' response in Matthew 19:8, "Because of your hardness of heart, **Moses permitted** you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."

Then, we get to verse 9, which parallels chapter 5:32, of the text we are interested in. Essentially, we can now move into our second point ...

2. The teaching of Jesus (verse 32)

In Matthew 19:9 here Jesus says, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." Jesus gives only one reason here that is permissible to divorce your wife. That only reason that Jesus gives for divorce is "immorality." The Greek word is porneia (porneia), which constitutes any wrongful sexual activity. That is, any sexual activity outside of marriage.

The reason why Jesus gives this as the only reason is because of how God intended marriage. He intended one man for one woman for life. But when another man or another woman involves himself sexually with another, they have already torn the marriage apart. Once the marriage has been torn apart through sexual immorality, the damage has been done. Bond has been broken. At this point, divorce is a technicality to announce what has already happened and to free the innocent party.

Under these circumstance, divorce is permissible. It must be mentioned here that though divorce is permissible, it is not commanded (see Matthew 9:7). The book of Hosea is an example of the man who remained faithful to his immoral spouse. This man was to demonstrate God's incredible love to His people. Yet, it must be noted that in the case of Israel, God divorced them, due to their prolonged unfaithfulness. Consider the following verses, ...

Jeremiah 3:6-8

Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. And I thought, 'After she has done all these things, she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also."

Due to prolonged and continued unfaithfulness on the part of Israel, God divorced them and wrote out a certificate of divorce, in accordance with Deuteronomy 24:3. This was not God's desire. He had hoped that they would turn from their harlotries. But in the end, God divorced them. If God divorced Israel, I would conclude that divorce is permissible. It doesn't have to occur in the case of adultery. If God gives the grace in such a circumstance to grant repentance to the guilty party, and to give a desire of reconciliation to the innocent party, the marriage can be restored. My counsel, as a pastor, will always be in the direction of reconciliation, because I believe that this is the heart of God. Divorce doesn't have to occur, but Jesus permits it. God did it. We can do it also.

Let's read verse 9 as the Pharisees would have heard it. Jesus said, "whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality [i.e. like burning the food, or hating the cats she brought into marriage, or stating irreconcilable differences, or something else] and marries another woman commits adultery." Let's now put the exception in the sentence, "whoever divorces his wife [for burning his food] and marries another woman commits adultery." In light of God's original intent for marriage, this makes perfect sense. If your wife has been a faithful partner to you, and you divorce your wife and cling to another, aren't you the guilty party? Haven't you committed adultery? You have been the one to rip the two apart from each other. And the Pharisees, who made divorce and remarriage easy, so as not to commit "adultery" in the technical sense, were, in reality, guilty of promoting adultery all over the place.

These Pharisees said that you were blameless according to the law as long as you jumped through the right legal hoops and divorced your wife properly before you married another man. They set the standard of righteousness very low. Jesus said, "listen, you think that you are righteous, because you have found ways to work the law into your favor, by manipulating it to satisfy your own lusts. I tell you that in all your manipulation to protect your righteousness, you have really committed adultery. Only, you have done so through your legal means."

Turn back to Matthew, chapter 5:32, and let me show this to you here. Though this third contrast is dealing with their loose marriage policy, Jesus is demonstrating that it was simply an attempt to justify their sexual lusts which was at the root of these policy changes. In Matthew 5:32 Jesus said, "but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for [the] cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

This word in the NASB translated "unchastity" is the same Greek word used in 19:9. It is *porneia* (porneia), any wrongful sexual activity. That is, any sexual activity outside of marriage. I don't know why the NAS translated it differently. It means the same thing. (I wish they were consistent).

Again, the thought is this. If you divorce your wife for burning the dessert and marry another, you commit adultery, because you are the one to rip apart the one-flesh. It is interesting, here, how Jesus puts this. He said that the one who does this "makes her commit adultery." In other words, the remarriage is assumed. You cannot commit adultery by remaining single. Jesus finishes by saying, "whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Again, it must be assumed that this divorce was in accordance with the current tradition of the Pharisees at that time -- the one who was divorced for trivial reasons.

Think about what Jesus is saying here. If ever a divorce occurs, one of two things must be true:

1. One of the members involved was unfaithful before the divorce took place, and thereby committed adultery.
2. A re-marriage by either party is the cause for the adultery to take place.

As such, Jesus ties together the sins of sexual sin, divorce and adultery. In so doing, He contends that they are simply pandering to their own lusts. It isn't my purpose this morning to give you a complete theology on divorce and re-marriage. I simply want us to keep in mind the main point of Jesus.

In any divorce, realize that adultery takes place at some point, when the unity of the sexual bond is broken in another union. The Pharisees thought they were blameless in these activities. While they thought themselves to be blameless through their technicalities, they were simply tinkering with the wording of the law of God.

Many people in the world have gone through a divorce and the results are devastating. It is devastating personally. It is devastating financially. It is devastating socially. The list could go on and on. For those who are divorced, they can feel the weight of this sin upon them,

especially when they see how closely Jesus associates divorce and adultery. The weight of the sin is tremendous.

Let me close with a word of encouragement for those who have been divorced or for those who will counsel with others who have been divorced. Divorce is not an unforgivable sin. Neither is adultery an unforgivable sin. Is it wicked? Is it evil? Yes, as all sin is. Does God hate it? Yes, Malachi 2:16 says so. But it is not unforgivable.

We don't gather here week after week because we are good and have never sinned. We gather here precisely because we have acknowledged that we have sinned, but found forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ. May we never, as Rock Valley Bible Church, think ourselves to be so righteous that we cannot love and accept those who have experienced adultery and divorce, but have repented and found forgiveness in Jesus.

Paul wrote, "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor [the] covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). At first glance, this sounds tremendously discouraging. Especially to those who have been divorced or who have been involved in sexual sin or those who understand the sin of their own hearts. Yet, Paul here isn't talking about those who have sinned only once. Rather, he is talking about those who love their sin and continue in it willingly. The proof comes in the next verse, "And such **were** some of you; but you **were** washed, but you **were** sanctified, but you **were** justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). In the church at Corinth, there were those within the church who sinned greatly. But God transformed them from the guilty (who would not inherit the kingdom of God) to the innocent, by justifying and sanctifying them through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is our message. We preach the awfulness and pervasiveness of sin. It is real and it is in each of us. It does terrible things. We preach the incredible forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. Those who trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their forgiveness will find complete forgiveness. God will remove your sin as far as the east is from the west. He will never bring it up again before you to condemn you. This is the glorious message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we believe it and spread it to a world that is hurting due to their sin.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 26, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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