



Matthew: Alive to God's Desire

Week #9: November 6, 2011

Matthew 5: 27-32

Matthew 5:27-32 (New International Version)

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, 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. ³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Start It

- After group prayer for discernment and presence of the Holy Spirit, take a few minutes to write down 5 (or more) reasons people divorce in our society. Briefly share thoughts and feelings about divorce and adultery (defined strictly as sex outside marriage, or broadly as any disloyalty to one's spouse, e.g. pornography, etc.). After doing the study questions, compare these reasons with Jesus' commands.
- Dan Savage (sex columnist) said a successful marriage is "basically an endless cycle of wrongs committed, apologies offered, and forgiveness granted..." Do you agree? Disagree? Does a Christian perspective change this definition?
- Why do you think divorce rates have increased in the last 50 years? Why have Christian divorce rates also increased?

Warning: *Before beginning the study questions, realize we will be talking about controversial material. Our purpose is primarily to discover what Jesus said and apply it to our life. We are not trying to convince others to adopt our ideas, opinions, beliefs or values. We cannot do justice with a few questions to issues that are learned throughout a lifetime and five verses that have spawned hundreds of books, etc. Hopefully purity of motives and areas of holiness can be reflected upon, with increased trust in God's grace.*

Study It

- "You have heard that it was said...but I tell you..." (Mt. 5.27,28) Where else in the Sermon on the Mount do you find this formula? (Hint: five other places) What is the point Jesus is making in Mt. 5.27,28? (See Prov. 14.30 and Jer. 17.9,10)
- Jesus never had trouble talking about hell (Mt. 5.22) and the Greek word *geenna* (*gehenna*) meaning everlasting punishment is found six places in Matthew. Interpreters don't generally interpret verses 29 and 30 literally, but the impact is powerful—eternal damnation awaits all who don't try to stop thoughts and feelings that lead to lust and immoral acts. Jesus has altered our disposition, so we must use stern discipline to cut off many things for the sake of new life in Christ. Do you agree? Disagree? Why? Share examples from your life.

- Deuteronomy 24.1-4 is referred to by Jesus in Mt. 5.31-32 (Luke 16.18, Mk.10.2-12), and in a more in-depth discussion in Matthew 19.3-9. Using Mt. 19.3-9 as a “commentary” or “midrash” on Mt. 5.31-32, give several reasons Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic Law strictly.
- We should expect temptation and infidelity to happen. Sexual lapses are as likely as any other sin. Like other sins, sexual liaisons leave deep relational wounds. Examine the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as a whole. What do the commandments against adultery and divorce have in common with Jesus’ other commands? How do they differ? (Hint: Look for major themes, like Jesus’ infinite value of all people.)

Live It

- Take 1-2 hours and write down all your relationships. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s help, then carefully examine your motives, desires, hopes, dreams, etc. in each of those relationships. Use the Sermon on the Mount, other scripture, books (e.g. Oswald Chamber’s *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*), to help elucidate motives and intents of your heart. Ask forgiveness where necessary, or do what you must to align your life with Christ’s commands.
- A better relationship with God creates better relationships with others. What opportunities are available to increase your effectiveness in the role of spouse? (Examples: silent retreats, weekends away together, more opportunities to read Scripture together, talk with one another about deep things of the faith, pray together....)
- It’s been said when we submit to God’s delegated authorities, we submit to God. Find time to talk with your spouse and discuss what part submission to delegated authority plays in your marriage relationship. If not married, find time to talk with a trusted friend about struggles with temptations to lustful thoughts, pride, rebellion, wounds, damaged relationships, and don’t forget to discuss resources (weapons) in Christ to fight the good fight. Then pray together as often as possible.
- If you’ve lived through separation, divorce or major difficulties in marriage, perhaps you could become a friend or mentor to a struggling couple or volunteer with Divorce Recovery at First Presbyterian. Perhaps you could share some of your challenges with co-workers or neighbors, ask for their help or encourage them through wisdom gained in your own life’s journey.

Pray It:

Below are some prayer starters and ideas for your own personal prayers.

- Pray for marriage to be defined and lived as God’s Word describes it. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh...be fruitful and increase in number.” (Genesis 2.24, 9.7 NIV) “Marriage is a sacrament designed by God that serves as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His church.” (Dr. James Dobson ...www.focusonthefamily.com)
- Pray for strengthened marriages, healed relationships, and a high value of family in homes across America.
- “Let marriage be held in honor among all...” (Hebrews 13.4 NRSV) Thank God for sturdy marriages that reflect His faithfulness and beauty. Pray especially for marriages... strained to the breaking point...[or] failing.” May God bring hope and help, re-center homes in Christ, heal broken hearts and restore intimacy. (*Seek God for the city 2005*, p.27)