



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS -
THE SERMON ON THE
MOUNT 12

Tonight

- We are covering the difficult topic of adultery and divorce tonight.
- It's possible that someone here has lived experience of these.
- Urging sensitivity and compassion.



Adultery (Mt 5:27-30)

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’
But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has
already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

**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.**

**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.**

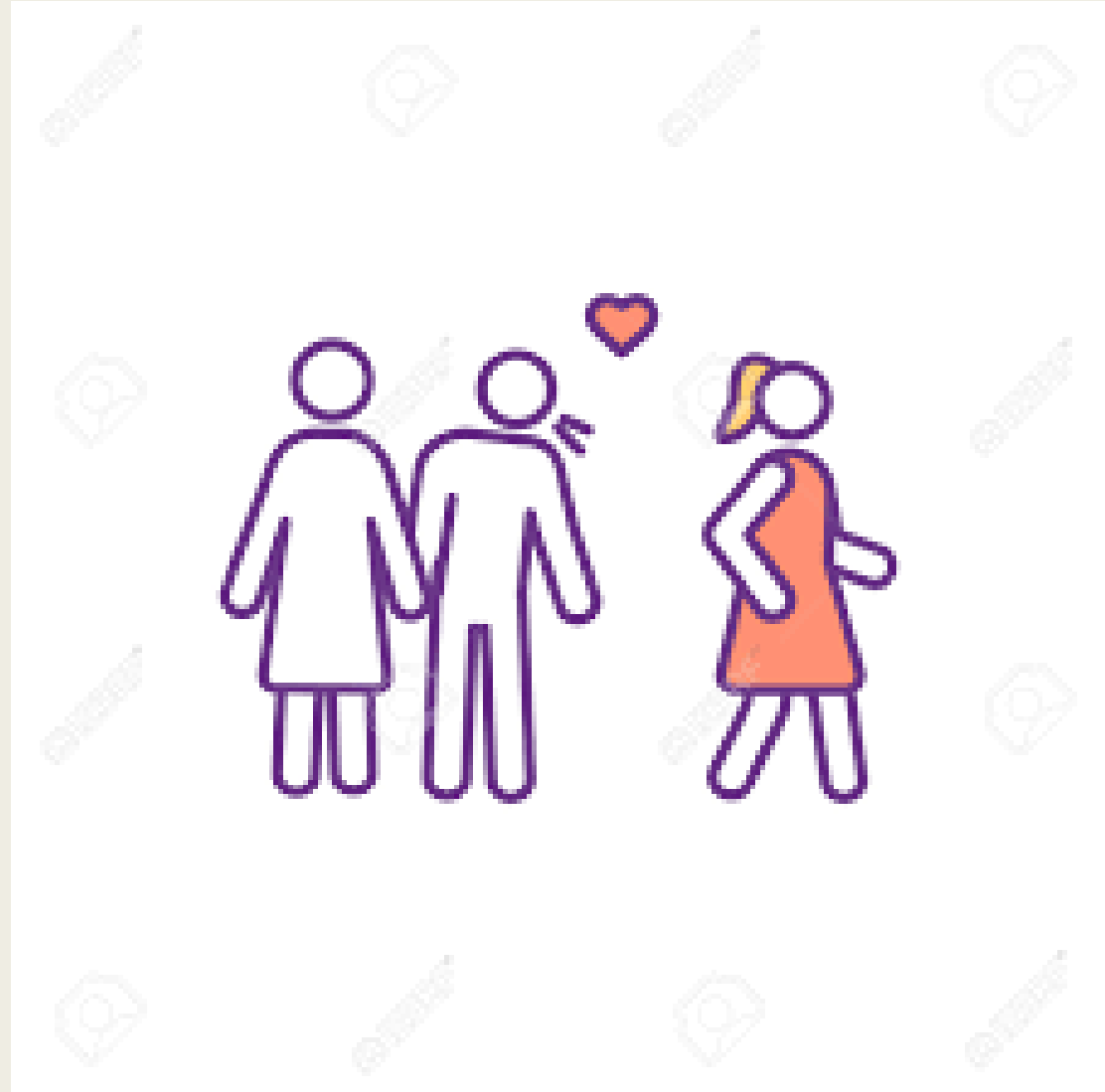


Initial Questions

- What is adultery?
- Why is it a problem?
- Gouging out eyes. Cutting off hands. What is this?
- Men only?
- Others?

Sure enough...

- You shall not commit adultery. (Ex 20:14)
- You shall not commit adultery. (Deut 5:18)
- Lev 20:
 - *Another man's wife*
 - *Wife of his father*
 - *Daughter-in-law*



How sin works...



- When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are *dragged away* by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

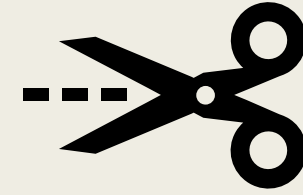
Own desire

Sin

Death

When in the sequence is the best time to deal with it?

Cutting off...



- The command to get rid of troublesome eyes, hands and feet is an example of our Lord's use of dramatic figures of speech. What he was advocating was not a literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial. Not mutilation but mortification is the path of holiness he taught, and 'mortification' or 'taking up the cross' to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we die to them or put them to death. [Stott]
- What do you think?

Eye - Heart connection

- **For out of the heart** come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them. (Mt 5:19-20, Mk 7:21)
- I made a covenant with my **eyes** not to look lustfully at a young woman. For what is our lot from God above, our heritage from the Almighty on high? ... If I have walked with falsehood or my **foot** has hurried after deceit —let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless —if my steps have turned from the path, if my **heart has been led by my eyes**, or if my **hands** have been defiled, then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted. “If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door, then may my wife grind another man’s grain, and may other men sleep with her. (Job 31:1-10)
- [false teachers]... With **eyes full of adultery**, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood! (2 Pet 2:14)



Recap: Threefold approach of Jesus

- **Traditional Righteousness = the traditional statement of the law/command/precept**
- **The Sinful pattern = the sinful violation, what it looks like.**
- **Transforming Initiative = what to do when you actually in that situation.**

Applying this approach...



Traditional
Righteousness – Do not
commit adultery

Sinful pattern – look
lustfully

Transforming Initiative –
look somewhere else, do
something else, go
somewhere else

Why is adultery a problem?

- The commandments, “**You shall not commit adultery,**” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “**Love your neighbor as yourself.**” **Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:9-10)**
- Adultery harms people, and is a violation of loving your neighbour as yourself.
- Breaking of a covenant also.
- Biblically, sex is designed for and reserved for covenantal marriage.

So, in practice...

- Transforming Initiatives.
- Recognising that adultery is a total marriage and family wrecker...
- The sinful pattern is dwelling long enough entertaining lustful thoughts and feelings....
- The way to get out of this is to very seriously and intentionally:
- Look somewhere else [if your eye causes you to sin]
- Do something else [if your hand causes you to sin]
- Go somewhere else [if your foot causes you to sin]
- Do not stay in the compromising situation, you may not be able to resist it.



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 sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Mt 5:31-32)

What's going on?

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent 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. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. [Deut 24:1-4]

The certificate is a protection for the woman – makes her marriageable in the culture.

You can't 'pimp' your wife either – temporary "marriages" to other men.

Jewish First Century Background

- Two main schools of Rabbinical thought
- **Hillel** – no fault, any cause divorce. “Some indecency” = word/thing + shameful = anything.
- **Shammai** – just cause required.
- The actual debate is recorded like this: in Sifré Deut.269 (see also m.Git.9.10)
The School of Shammai says: A man should not divorce his wife except for indecency found in her, since it says: "For he found in her an indecency cause" [Deut.24.1].
And the School of Hillel says: Even if she spoiled his dish, since it says: "[Any] cause"[Deut.24.1].
- If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her **food, clothing and marital rights**. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money. (Ex 20:10)



Roman First Century Background

- Divorce fairly common especially in upper classes
- Divorced wife could expect return of her dowry, but could lose half if found guilty of adultery
- Law did not recognise adultery by husbands.
- Laws against remaining **unmarried**
- Together, the laws decreed that women between 20 and 50, and men between 25 and 60, were to be married and having children. *Caelibes*, those who were not married (or at least betrothed) were not allowed to receive an inheritance or legacy from someone who was not related to them within the sixth degree of kinship. *Orbi*, the married but childless, could receive only half of what they were left by those beyond the sixth degree of kinship, and could receive only ten percent of their spouse's property by will. Under the *lex Julia* of 18 BCE, widows were allowed a grace period of only a year before they had to remarry, and divorcées were allowed just six months; the *lex Papia et Poppaea* extended this to two years for widows and eighteen months for divorcées.

Jesus' view

- Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” “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 sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” [Mt 19:1-10]
- What is Jesus doing here?
- He is placing the “legal issue” back inside the context of God’s original design.
- “You are missing the point. It’s not about obeying Moses “command” here, but on God’s design and character”

Jesus says:



- Keep your marital vows
- Without valid grounds remarriage is adultery
- Divorce should be a last resort
- Contradicts polygamy
- Contradicts compulsory divorce for adultery (you could work it out)
- Contradicts compulsory marriage (cf Romans law, Jews taught “go forth and multiply”).
- Very counter-cultural, but creating *shalom* for all.



Reflection

- Anything new for me here?
- Do I have such a radical attitude towards avoiding sin in general?
- Are there any other areas where I can use a “legal approach” instead of a God’s design approach?