

# Adultery & Divorce ... Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:27-32 (p. 1502)

adultery (n): voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person's current spouse or partner –*Merriam-Webster*

- Exodus 20:14 (p. 118)
- Deuteronomy 5:18 (p. 283)
- Leviticus 18:20 (p. 184)

“It is the paradox of human nature that there was no sin regarded in Judaism with greater horror than adultery, and there was no sin which, to judge by the rebukes of the sages and prophets, was more common.” – *William Barclay*

In Jewish law, “a married man is not guilty of adultery unless he has intercourse with a married woman other than his wife. Adultery is in Jewish eyes specially and uniquely the crime against the marriage bed.” – *Barclay*

Two considerations of the time:

1. Women as property (marriage was not a partnership)
2. Friendship between genders was not a thing

Who got punished? Depends.

- Leviticus 20:10 (p. 186)
- Deuteronomy 22:23-29 (p. 307)
- Leviticus 21:9 (p. 188)

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount – what is his definition of adultery?

Legalistic vs. theological (the act vs. the root cause)

Sins forbidden by the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment per the Westminster Larger Catechism (*not a complete list*):

- Adultery
- Fornication
- Rape
- Incest
- Sodomy, and all unnatural lusts
- All unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections
- All corrupt or filthy communications, or listening
- Wanton looks
- Impudent or light behavior
- Immodest apparel
- Unjust divorce or desertion
- Idleness, gluttony, drunkenness
- Unchaste company
- Lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays

“Adherence to Jesus allows no free rein to desire unless it be accompanied by love. To follow Jesus means self-renunciation and absolute adherence to him, and therefore a will dominated by lust can never be allowed to do what it likes. Even momentary desire is a barrier to the following of Jesus, and brings the whole body into hell.” – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Listening to what Jesus says in Matthew, what is the penalty?

“No sacrifice is too great if it enables us to conquer a lust which cuts us off from Jesus. Both eye and hand are less than Christ, and when they are used as the instruments of lust and hinder the whole body from the purity of discipleship, they must be sacrificed for the sake of him. The gains of lust are trivial compared with the loss it brings – you forfeit your body eternally for the momentary pleasure of eye or hand. When you have made your eye the instrument of impurity, you cannot see God with it.” – *Bonhoeffer*

So why aren't there more men walking the earth with just one eye and one hand?

“Jesus does not impose intolerable restrictions on his disciples, he does not forbid them to look at anything, but bids them look on him. If they do that he knows that their gaze will always be pure, even when they look upon a woman. So far from imposing on them an intolerable yoke of legalism, he succours them with the grace of the gospel.” – *Bonhoeffer*

What does this mean for us today, in the age of #metoo and harassment in the workplace, etc.?

## **Divorce**

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (p. 309) – Who could initiate divorce?

Matthew 19:8-12 (p. 1528)

What is “marital unfaithfulness”?

- NSRV: “unchastity”
- KJV: “fornication”
- Common English Bible: “sexual unfaithfulness”

Is there any other justification for divorce?

### **Westminster Confession of Faith:**

6.137 It is the divine intention that persons entering the marriage covenant become inseparably united, thus allowing for no dissolution save that caused by the death of either husband or wife. However, the weaknesses of one or both partners may lead to gross and persistent denial of the marriage vows so that marriage dies at the heart and the union becomes intolerable; yet only in cases of extreme, unrepented-of, and irremediable unfaithfulness (physical or spiritual) should separation or divorce be considered. Such separation or divorce is accepted as permissible only because of the failure of one or both of the partners, and does not lessen in any way the divine intention for indissoluble union.

6.138 6. The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the church, in keeping with the redemptive gospel of Christ, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifested.

“While it points to God’s ultimate will for men and women, there are numerous instances in which a marriage is no longer real, whether because of infidelity, neglect, abuse, failure to communicate, or simply unresolved tensions regarding reciprocal expectations. While every effort should be made to redeem fractured marriages, some must be acknowledged as beyond repair. In such cases divorce may be not only the lesser of two evils from the point of view of God’s ultimate will but also a positive step.” – *Douglas R.A. Hare*

“The intention of the Old Testament law is the same as that of Jesus, to uphold the purity of marriage, and to see that it is exercised in faith in God. But purity or chastity is safeguarded amongst those who follow Jesus and share his life.”  
– *Bonhoeffer*