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Matthew 5:27 - 5:37: Adultery, Divorce, and Oaths (Part 2)



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores Matthew 5:27-37 and the topics of adultery, divorce, and oaths. He emphasizes the importance of exercising discernment in managing sexual desires and avoiding lusting after others in one's heart. Additionally, he delves into the nuances of divorce in a Christian context, highlighting the issue of unfaithfulness and the difficulty of navigating this sensitive topic. Lastly, he addresses the topic of making vows and swearing oaths, cautioning against making binding vows that can be harmful and the importance of keeping one's promises.

Transcript

We're going to keep plugging now through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. At the end of our last session, we got into a little bit what Jesus had to say about the subject of adultery. And we spent just enough time on it for me to bring out what I think was the major point he's making, that as they had heard it said by the rabbis for many years, and of course from the scriptures, you should not murder, they'd also heard you should not commit adultery. And they thought of these only in terms of external behaviors.

Murdering is when you kill somebody. Adultery is when you sleep with somebody's wife or with their husband. And if they didn't do these exact things outwardly, they felt reasonably good about the fact that they were measuring up to God's standard.

But there are so many other areas of life that are objectionable to God for the same reasons that murder and adultery are objectionable. Namely, that murder and adultery are acts of injustice. They are acts of treachery.

They are acts of cheating somebody out of something that they have coming. Cheating a person out of his right to his life is what murder is. Cheating a person out of his right to his life is really what adultery is, or to her husband.

And that being so, there are many examples that can be found in ordinary life of similar cheating, similar injustice, neglect of doing what is just and right. And of course, mental

adultery, the adultery of the heart, is what Jesus brings up first. And I mentioned it briefly, but I want to look at this subject again because we came to it only in the last minutes of the last session, and it certainly deserves a little better treatment than that.

Beginning at Matthew 5, 27, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.

For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than that your whole body be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Now, as I said at the end of the last session, mental adultery is wrong for the same reason that physical adultery is wrong. Now, if physical adultery was wrong simply because it was a misuse of sexual drive, which it certainly is that, but if that's all it was, it would not at all be clear why looking at a woman to desire her would have equal wrongness about it, unless we just want to say God just has this thing where he hates sex, even sexual thoughts, and that sex to God is just a corrupt thing, and he doesn't want us enjoying anything about our sexuality, and therefore he forbids almost every kind of sex except that which is necessary for the unavoidable necessity of reproduction, and therefore sex is dirty. A lot of people think sex is dirty.

And the reason for it is that most sex, as practiced in a corrupt society, is dirty. But it's a shame that Christians, even when married sometimes, don't know that sex is permissible and blessed, and God designed it, and God is not against it, but he is certainly against its abuse when it hurts other people, when it deprives people of their rights, and of course when it deprives God of what he has coming. We know that it says in Malachi chapter 2 that God made husbands and wives because he desired that they would produce godly offspring.

It specifically says that. And so God has something he expects out of marriage too, something to be brought to his benefit, godly offspring. God made marriage for himself, that is so that there would be godly offspring produced for his benefit, for his glory.

But marriage is made in such a way that it involves people in such an intimacy and such a bonding that any violation of marital sex is a grievous, painful agony. Adultery has been described as the most cruel, non-violent act that one person can commit against another, and that is a fair assessment. Now looking at a woman to lust after her doesn't hurt anybody it seems, and yet Jesus says it's bad, it's adultery in the heart.

But it does hurt somebody, even if they don't know they're being hurt. You know you can be hurt without knowing it. If you're an employer, you can have an employee embezzling

without you ever finding out.

You don't hurt subjectively from it, but you are damaged objectively from it. And there is something that is made bad. First of all, if a person is lusting after a woman, it may begin and end with a fleeting fantasy.

In fact that fantasy may well be uninvited and unwelcome by the person to whom it enters. We need to remember that temptation is not the same thing as sin, and Jesus is not condemning temptation. Furthermore, we need to realize that temptation falls into the categories of the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

And the lust of the flesh has to do with desires that the physical body, in its fallen state, but also to a certain extent even before the fall, has built into it. The desire for food, the desire for sex, the desire for drink, the desire for sleep. These are things that are part of the mechanical system we have.

This is part of our biological nature. God built in the desires for these things. And the problem with the body is, the body is a very undiscerning thing.

It is the spirit of man and the mind of man that do the discerning. Therefore, the body, which is just built to desire food, doesn't know the difference between food that is legitimately accessible and food that belongs to someone else. And stealing, if you had no conscience to guide your body, if you had no spiritual principles, your body would just eat whatever it gets its hands on.

Little kids who have not yet been taught do this. I mean, little kids often will, little babies, just walk up and take something off your plate and eat it. Why? Because their body desires food.

It's a pure desire. It's a good desire to desire food, but they don't have the discernment to know that some food is not theirs, and that it is wrong to take what is not theirs. Likewise, the desire for sex is something God designed.

He expects people to have sexual desire, but he also expects them to exercise discernment as to what is a legitimate and what is not a legitimate exercise of those desires. And what belongs and what does not belong to you, in terms of freedom of expression of sexual desire. Now, a fleeting thought of sexual attraction, or even arousal, has been known to occur to people.

I don't know for sure, because I've never been a woman, but I know it's a serious problem among most men. And from what I've heard, I think it's a bigger problem among men than women, but I think that women probably have the problem from time to time too. But men, you know, it's interesting that the statement Jesus makes assumes that the listener is a man.

Of course, his disciples sitting there were men. There may have been women nearby, I don't know. He had a lot of crowds around him when he preached this.

But he assumes a man to be the one who's going to have the biggest problem, or the most likely offender. And men are always complaining to me, Christian men are always complaining to me, about their fear that they are guilty of adultery in the heart. Because they are thrust into situations where there are visual stimuli.

Maybe women who work where they work, who dress immodestly, or simply pictures on billboards, or wherever they go, wherever they look, they see things. And some men struggle with that. In fact, just as women have their monthly cycles, men have cycles of sorts, not monthly.

But they have their times, seasons where there are more, and seasons where there are less vulnerable to sexual arousal. And at times, which are more so, some men, just a fleeting image, just to see a picture that they didn't intend to see, can be enough to give them a problem, momentarily at least. And maybe for a protracted struggle with a sexual thought.

Men who have this problem, often when they read the words of Jesus, condemn themselves and say, well, I guess I'm just an adulterer in my heart. And it may not be so. It may be that what they are experiencing is merely temptation.

To sense an attraction, or to be aroused by an attraction to something that you are not seeking out and not desiring, but it is in your environment and it arouses desire in you, is temptation. As I mentioned at the end of the last session, if you're fasting and you don't want to eat, you feel like you shouldn't be eating, but you walk by a bakery and you smell cookies being made, and it arouses a desire for cookies. You can picture those cookies.

You begin to salivate, it may be. You are not sinning. Unless you say, well, even though I'm fasting, I'm going to enjoy and savor the joy of eating in my imagination.

Then, of course, you're acting against the whole spirit of your fasting altogether. But if you have a temptation that comes from your environment and you do not welcome it, you do not indulge it, then, of course, you might think you've sinned, but you have not. You've only been tempted.

The Bible says, lust, when it has conceived, brings forth sin, in James chapter 1. When lust conceives, it brings forth sin. Lust exists before the sin exists, because lust is nothing else but desire. We're full of desires.

Even Jesus had bodily desires. Even Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, but without sin. To be tempted is not sin.

But lust, when it is conceived, I believe is when you agree to it. Sin is committed in the will. If you are bombarded with sexual temptations through no fault of your own, that is, you're not seeking them out, you're even trying to avoid them, but they come into your environment and they bother you.

This is not in itself sin. When you choose to welcome it, when you say, yes, I will think about this, I will enjoy this, I will not resist this, then you have sinned. That lust has conceived.

You may not ever do anything about it. You might not ever physically do anything, but if your mind has embraced it, you have embraced it with your heart. The act has occurred in your heart.

You've committed adultery in your heart. And that's why Jesus didn't say, whoever looks at a woman and lusts has committed adultery, because that's not true. Men sometimes look at a woman without any intention of lust.

Sometimes they don't even know there's a woman in their range of vision before they look there. But they see, and they see something that arouses desire. And women probably do the same thing from time to time.

Maybe more often than I know. But the fact is, that is a temptation when that occurs. But if you look at a woman to lust after her, that is a decision.

That is the will, choosing lust, choosing to fantasize, choosing to use or exploit the attractiveness of somebody's body to bring about a sexual-like gratification. That may not ever result in a physical act, but it is nonetheless the act in the heart. Just like murder in the heart can take place without murder physically occurring.

And the judgment be equal for it. Now, even, I've told you before, Jesus didn't really introduce anything brand new in the Sermon on the Mount. I can't think of anything in the Sermon on the Mount that doesn't have its origins or roots in the Old Testament.

This particular thought about looking at a woman and lusting after her, being wrong, looking at a woman to lust after her, is from a very old book in the Old Testament. From perhaps the oldest book in the Old Testament, which is the book of Job. In Job chapter 31, in verse 1, Job says, I have made a covenant with my eyes.

Why then should I look upon a young woman? He made an agreement with his eyes that he would not allow them to look at a young woman. Now, look upon a young woman. There's probably an intended difference between look at and look upon.

I'm not sure that I could lexically find it. I think it would be more of a matter of usage. But to look at something happens in a moment.

To look upon is more like gazing, more like staring. And to tell you the truth, I'm aware of men, Christian men, who look at women a great deal, but tell me they don't lust after women. And they spend a lot of their time deliberately looking at women.

I actually knew a man who enjoyed painting nudes, who was a Christian. He didn't only paint nudes, but he was a painter, and among the things he liked to paint were nudes. I don't recall him painting any nude men, though, but he painted nude women from time to time.

He didn't use live models. He used photographs or whatever. But it always struck me as strange, and I confronted him about it more than once.

And he said, well, I don't have any lust after these women that I'm looking at. I'm not lusting. I'm not thinking sexually.

I've just looked at their body as a masterpiece of art, as the beautiful creation of God. And I'm just, as a painter, interested in putting on canvas representations of the beautiful things in nature that God has made, including beauties of the human anatomy. Well, I had to take his word for it.

I don't know what's going on in his heart. Maybe he's a better man than most, although other things in his life didn't necessarily convince me that he was a better man than most. So I don't know.

I mean, like I say, I just had to take his word for it. I can't be sure, but it strikes me as very foolish for a man to deliberately place women within his field of vision and hold them there, hold his attention on their bodies for a long period of time, even if he's not doing it to lust, specifically. Of course, he might be doing it to lust and not knowing he's doing it to lust.

Our heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it, it says in Jeremiah. And I have a feeling that there may be lust present at times when we're calling it by some other name.

There's certainly no moral requirement upon men to paint nudes, even if it could be argued that nude bodies are part of the beauty of nature. But so what? Even if that is true, there's nothing in the law of God that requires that men paint the beauties of nature, nor paint nude bodies, if they do paint other natural phenomena. To my mind, a man is always in danger if he's gazing at a woman, even if she's not nude, much more if she is.

And that while men should not be ashamed to look a woman in the eye in conversation or to look at women, briefly and in the way that one looks at anyone, it's a dangerous thing for a man to gaze at a woman. That's what I understand Job doing when he said, why should I look upon a woman? It's not that he wouldn't ever see a woman. It's not like

he would go running the other direction if he heard there was a woman in the room and he didn't want to see it.

Like he turned to stone if he saw a medusa or something. It's rather that gazing on a woman was simply not wise for him. Or for any man, apparently.

Job was the more righteous man than most. And I don't know that he would be a man that had more of a sex problem than the average man. He was even an old man.

As I understand it, as men get older, their sex drive even becomes weaker. I don't know this from experience. I'm getting old.

I'm not that old yet. But I hope that this is true. I'll tell you, Christians are an odd breed to the world.

I remember listening to a talk radio program a few weeks ago or months ago, and they were talking about some kind of a drug that had come out that helped bald men recover their hair, or helped balding men keep their hair. It was some kind of an anti-hair loss kind of a drug recently released by the FDA and permitted to be sold, and it was all in the news. And one of the things was that with some men, taking this drug decreases their libido, it said.

And I remember one talk show host spending his whole hour taking calls from people asking, would you, if you're balding, take a drug that would decrease your libido in order to gain hair? And he wanted to know what men valued more, their hair or their libido. Well, I'm not too concerned about hair loss and never have been. And if I went bald, I wouldn't think of the crisis.

I wouldn't probably do anything to halt it. But I might take something to reduce the libido. Because what's amazing to me is how many men call up and say, no way, man.

I don't care about my hair loss. I'm not going to lose my libido. I guess I've never quite understood that as a Christian, because from teenage years on, being mindful of what Jesus said, I've always desired to be free from lust.

And I remember sitting around with another minister, I may have mentioned his name before, if I told you the story before, I won't mention it right now. But another guy in this room who's married today, but we were both single in those days, and we used to discuss quite soberly whether castration was an option for the Christian. We knew that in origin, one of the church fathers had castrated himself.

We wondered how many others might have done so, and whether that might even be what Jesus had meant. Well, he said, some make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake, because we're both in full-time ministry. We both wanted to be undistracted by women.

And neither of us were as undistracted as we wanted to be. And it was a serious consideration. Neither of us made the decision.

Both of us are fathers today, and married men. But that is something the world can't understand. Why would you ever wish a lessening of your sexual drive? It's the last thing most men in the world would want.

But to a person spiritually minded, it's not that we despise the sex drive. And within marriage, it's good to have one. But it doesn't have to be all that strong, necessarily.

You've got a lifetime to father children. And you don't have to have sexual activity more than once every nine months to do the job, either. Although I'm not saying that's my practice.

But I'm saying that the need for sex drive is not all the world thinks it is. And it is obviously, to Christians, a very great struggle in many cases. Some don't struggle too much.

But most do, I think. And most feel condemned because of the struggle. And because Jesus said, if you look at a woman to lust, and they think, well, I think I do that every day.

I've heard men say that. You know, I don't want to, but I think I do that every day. And when it really gets entered, they're not looking at anyone to lust.

They're struggling against lust. They're not deciding to agree to temptation. They're fighting it.

While you're struggling, while you're resisting the devil, he isn't winning. When you're resisting temptation, you are not sinning. And so it's very important to note that what Jesus is speaking of is talking to people who deliberately desired to arouse themselves and get some kind of a sexual pleasure from a visual stimulus from women who are not their wives.

And he was informed, this is adultery, just as much as if you went out and slept with them. But he is not trying to say that when a man has a sexual drive, that in itself is sin, even if it is sometimes aroused at the wrong time or toward the wrong people. Now, this business about the eye and the hand.

If your right eye causes you to sin, if your right hand causes you to sin, get rid of it. Cast it from you. It's better to be without it and enter into life than to keep it and go to hell.

It's a little bit like what he said about murder. He wants them to understand that there's an urgency about this. To violate God's standards of justice and purity and righteousness is not a small matter.

Hellfire is the price to pay. He said that also in verse 22, that he that calls his brother fool

shall be in danger of hellfire. Likewise, here he says, if your hand or your eye cause you to sin, you are in danger of hellfire.

Better to get rid of the danger, even at the cost of an eye or a hand. I mentioned that there are people who have taken this seriously. In fact, it's probably one of those things that has led men like Origen to castrate himself.

I've known men who did not castrate themselves, but tried to cut their hand off and try to pluck their eye out, and some have succeeded. It's a very, very sad thing, because people who have come to the scriptures with a Western orientation, reading an Eastern book where the Jews and Jesus and the prophets, they express themselves in modes that we are not acquainted with here in the West until we become acquainted by study of the scripture. People don't recognize hyperbole, and that can be very dangerous not to recognize hyperbole.

The point Jesus is making is that a man's eye or his hand are among the things most valuable to him, and yet, however valuable they may be, they are not as valuable as eternal life, and if something, even an eye or a hand, would prevent you from being saved, then you'd be better off getting rid of that than living without salvation and ending up in hell with both hands and both eyes. Now, how this really comes down in real life practice would be more not so much your hand or your eye, because, by the way, your hand and your eye do not cause you to sin. Jesus said elsewhere, your heart causes you to sin.

He says, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts and adulteries and murders and blasphemies and so forth. He said that in Matthew chapter 15, if you want a verse number for it. It's, well, where's that list? It's verse 19, Matthew 15, 19.

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. He says, these are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. It's not the hand, it's not even the eye.

It's the heart that causes adultery. It's the heart that causes, to look at a woman to lust after her is a choice of the heart. So, you can't cut your heart out, and if you plucked out your eye but still had a wicked heart, or cut off a hand and still had a wicked heart, your other hand and other eye would still get you into trouble.

If you plucked out both eyes and cut off both hands and still had a wicked heart, you would still find ways to fantasize, even if you're blind and maimed. It is not to be thought that Jesus really intended for anybody to pluck their eye out or cut their hand out, because that is not really where the problem lies. He speaks hypothetically.

If it were even your hand, if it was even your eye that caused you to sin, even that should be thrown out with disdain and with violence, cast it from you, in order to be

saved. Now, since, of course, the scenario he suggests is not even a possible one, since it's not even possible that your hand causes you to sin, the cause lies elsewhere, and it will not be your hand or your eye that really prevents you from going into eternal life, but other things might, then we have to ask, well, what is it that he's referring to? Whatever it is, even if it's worth as much as a hand or an eye, you should part with it, he's saying. But what is it really that might prevent you? Well, it might be a relationship.

There might be people, friends, that your loyalty to them keeps you from following Jesus Christ. And, you know, a lot of people say, well, I don't mind going to hell. All my friends are going to be there.

Well, it's better to enter into life without your friends than to be thrown in hell with your friends. Your friends are not going to be enjoying your company, nor you theirs, if you end up in hell. And no one's going to enjoy anything there.

But it is friends, many times, and other relationships, parents or whatever, who prevent many people from following Jesus. That's why Jesus said, he that loves wife or children or father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. So, relationships might well be one of the things that is like a hand or an eye preventing someone from coming into eternal life, causing you to sin.

Another thing might be some possession, something of value, owned and possessed, maybe expensive to replace or sentimental and impossible to replace. And yet, something offensive to God, something that is actually an idol in the life. Something that you know that if you were really right with God, you'd have to be rid of that.

But, not so sure you want to be rid of that. And that would be a thing that could cause you to sin. Your heart's attachment to some possession.

See, in all these cases, it's the heart. Your heart's attachment to some relationship, your heart's attachment to some possession, perhaps your heart's attachment to some ambition, your heart's desire to be an educated person, to be a professional person, to be a respected person, to be a powerful person, to be an influential person, all of which you suspect might have to be surrendered if you're going to do the will of God in your life instead. Well, those things may seem precious.

Your heart may be set on those things, but it's better to be without them and go to eternal life than to hold on to them and go to eternal death. Now, in this context, I'm not sure why Jesus brings up in this context. It might be because he was talking about looking at a woman to lust after her, and then he talks about plucking out the eye.

If a person looks at a woman to lust after her, the eye is not the problem, the heart is the problem. It's the to lust is the problem, not the look. And it may be that Jesus brought it up for that reason, but if he does, he's still using the eye figuratively.

What he'd be saying is, you know, if your sex drive is what gives you the most pleasure in your sexual fantasies, your heart is just addicted to these things and attached to them, it's not going to be easy to get rid of them. By the way, sexual corruption in the soul is one of the hardest kind to get rid of. And once that wall has been broken down by illicit sex, whether it's exposure to pornography or premarital sex or something else, it is extremely difficult to recover purity, if possible at all.

Total purity is very difficult, if not fully elusive, to recover. But it must be done. At least it must be warned after.

It must be something that if you have struggles with that, you must not stop struggling. You must cast it from you as much as you can. And those things which feed it, you should put far from you.

If you go to the beach, see a lot of people where I come from in Southern California and in Santa Cruz, they're all surfers. A lot of Christians are surfers. A lot of the guys have problems with lust.

I never could quite understand why they don't put it together. You know, they spend their time at the beach with most of their clothes off and most of the people they're looking at have their clothes off. And, you know, a lot of those people they look at are women.

In Santa Cruz, the beach is, it's even legal to be out nude on the beach. And there are some people nude on the beach, but even if they're not, there's hardly any difference in the way most people dress on the beach anyway. Now, what if a Christian man was struggling with lust in his life and it was getting the better of him, and he was, as it were, an adulterer in his heart, because he was losing the battle and surrendering too often.

And he was a surfer. I don't know if you've ever known surfers. In Oregon, there aren't as many.

But surfers many times idolize surfing. That is really their god, the waves, the board, the camaraderie. It's a whole culture, and it's an idol to many people.

And yet, it is one of those things that may, for some men, maybe most, perhaps because it keeps men at the beach so much, and the beach is the place of immodesty, more than most places in our society, it may be the place that causes the struggle. It may be the eye that's causing the sin or the hand. It is a habit.

It is a pursuit. It is a location that should be cast from. I lived in Santa Cruz for ten years.

I went to the beach, I think, twice. Believe it or not, you can live near the beach and not be a beach person. You don't have to go to the beach.

Some people can't imagine not doing that. But that's because their imagination is corrupt, I guess. Because if a person wants to follow God, they will identify the places of temptation and avoid them.

A person who has had a habit in pornography has got to be very violent with his spirit against that habit, which some would even call an addiction. I'm a little cautious about using the word addiction, because it's a vague term, and it's more psychological than biblical. But if we use the word addiction to be something that always, you know, it's stronger than you are, and you always succumb to it, there certainly are people of whom it could be said they have an addiction to pornography.

I know a man in ministry for many years. He actually goes to a church in this town. He used to be a pastor in a church associated with the church he now attends.

And he left the pastor because he was a voyeur, which means a peeping Tom. It was a habit he couldn't get over. They sent him to a Christian counselor.

I don't think that was the best place to go, but a Christian counselor told me he had a sex addiction. Well, who doesn't have a sex addiction? If addiction means that you've got struggles and... Well, I mean, if you succumb to it, maybe that's not an addiction, that's just sin. Addiction is a therapeutic term.

Sin is a different kind of term. But the man was a sinner, and I realize, you know, there but for the grace of God go any of us. I don't condemn him for it, but they sent him to a counselor because he had a habit he could not break of watching women undress through the window.

Now, I mean, there's all kinds of kinky perversions in our society now, and they're multiplying. And they're found even among ministers at times. But even if you're not a minister, if you're just a Christian, you have to make war against sexual temptation.

You have to cast from you those things that contribute to your defeat. And for some people, privacy is it. I mean, let's speak plainly.

A lot of people, including some Christians, masturbate. But they don't usually do it in company. Most people who masturbate do it all alone.

There are places that they go. And if it is solitude itself that is the downfall that causes you to sin, then a person ought to avoid that kind of solitude at all costs. I mean, I might as well speak plainly, because that's where people are living.

There's a lot of Christians struggling with those kinds of issues. And yet they're not putting it together. It is because I am in this situation that I put myself in.

It is because I am in this environment that I expose myself to. It is because of these

stimuli that I allow into my life that I struggle. Jesus said, if it causes you to sin, get rid of it violently.

You might say, well, I can't take a shower. Well, if the shower is a place of sin, then don't take a shower. Go to a public shower where there's a lot of people showering.

Save yourself a problem, unless you're homosexual. Let's face it, we cannot avoid all temptation. But there are some that we can.

There are some situations that we do not avoid that we could, which for some people may be the cause of their continuous falling. What Jesus is saying is, no sacrifice is too great to make for your soul. What does it profit a man? He said elsewhere, if a man gains the whole world and loses his soul.

And the sacrifice of an eye or a hand is an incredible sacrifice to make. But Jesus said, that's a good trade. If that's what it takes to enter into life.

Let's look at verses 31 and 32. Matthew 5, 31 and 32. Furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a woman who is divorced, commits adultery. I want to read the next one too.

Verse 33 through 37. Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all.

Neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

But let your yes be yes, and your no, no, for whatever is more than these is from the evil one. Now I said earlier that I believe there are two of Jesus' examples that have to do with justice and two that have to do with faithfulness and two that have to do with mercy. These two, about divorce and about oaths, I believe focus on the issue of faithfulness.

Just as Jesus was saying, you can avoid committing murder, but still be unjust. You can avoid committing adultery and still be guilty of the same injustice. So he wants to talk to them about the need to avoid all unfaithfulness.

And there were ways in which unfaithfulness was being justified in the way the Jews practiced their religion. They might not have called it unfaithfulness, but that's why Jesus had to bring it up. You are being unfaithful.

The two ways were simply this. By divorcing their wives without adequate provocation, they were being unfaithful to their marriage vows. And by taking vows, the method they used to take vows, and we will read something about that in the scripture in a moment, was a way of being unfaithful, of being dishonest.

And so both of these things, Jesus is focusing on the need to be faithful, to be honest, to keep your word, to maintain integrity. And one is in the illustration of marriage, the other is in the illustration of other relationships of other people toward whom you make vows. Maybe I should talk about vows first, although Jesus mentions it secondly.

The reason is because we don't understand it as well as his disciples did. Maybe I ought to get this cleared up. What is a vow? In the King James, it says don't swear.

Well, here it says don't swear, falsely. You shall perform your oaths to the Lord. An oath or a vow or swearing, swearing an oath or swearing a vow, was making a solemn affirmation that something you were saying was true.

You were basically declaring the truthfulness of your comments by invoking a higher virtue than your own. It says in Hebrews chapter 6, men always swear by one greater than themselves. God swore an oath, but he had to swear by himself since there was nothing greater than himself.

But men swear by something greater than themselves. Why? The purpose of an oath in those days was like the purpose of a contract today or a signed agreement. It is because people are dishonest, sometimes at least.

Not all people are always dishonest, but all people are sometimes or have been known to be or anyone might turn up to be. You just never know. People and dishonesty go together, unfortunately.

It doesn't go together with Christianity, but it goes together with human nature. Let God be true in every man a liar, is what Paul says. Men are generally liars.

Because they are, we need to be careful about any promises that men make or any affirmations they make, the believing of which might endanger us or bring some risk to ourselves. If a person says, if a father puts his kid up on a high piece of furniture and says, jump to me and I'll catch you, for the child to believe that father is to take a certain risk. What if the father is lying? If the father will not catch his son, although he said he would, that son will get hurt.

And believing, many times, involves a risk. In fact, even believing the gospel involves a risk. If you believe the gospel and follow Jesus Christ and he turned out not to be true, what have you lost? You've lost a whole life of doing something else you might have maybe sensually enjoyed better.

By the way, following Jesus Christ I don't think ever would hurt a person because the life of righteousness is a more healthy, wholesome life that has fewer regrets than any other kind of life. And in the long run, even if you forfeit a life of sin in order to follow Christ and if the gospel turned out not to be true, you would have lost nothing of value. But the fact of the matter is, of course, God is faithful, God is true.

And that is one reason he wants us to be that way. He wants the world to see that there is such a thing as truthfulness in God's people and that is the truthfulness of God himself reflected in their character. If people cannot believe God, then they can't be saved.

And if God is not known to be truthful, they can't believe him. And therefore, integrity in the Christian life is extremely important to cause people to see there is such a thing as someone who tells the truth, a person who follows God, because God is truth-telling God. Now, because people sometimes lie and because believing people sometimes involves a risk, today we sign contracts.

If I go to a car dealer and say, I'd like to buy this car but I can't afford it right now, they say, no problem, we'll give you a payment plan. You just give us \$200 down right now and make a \$100 payment per month and you can drive off with this car. You can even sign it over.

And I'd say, well, that sounds good, but how does he know I'm going to make those payments? What if I make the \$200 down payment and never make another payment? And I try to own the car for \$200 merely. Well, of course, they anticipate that. There's contracts you sign.

There's legally binding things that make it so you would be taken to court, you would be sued or whatever if you didn't make your payments. That's what a contract is for. It's in case I'm not faithful.

In case I make a promise and don't keep it, it can be enforced. Well, back in biblical times, they didn't have contracts like that, or at least they didn't use them generally in their transactions, but they still had the same problem of people making promises that they didn't keep. And what they had instead of contracts in those days was what they called an oath or a vow.

So that if I said, listen, I'll take this car today and I'll send you all the money next week, and they say, well, I don't know you. How do I know you'll send the money? I could say, well, I swear by God that I'll send it. That'd be enough.

That would end all dispute. Oh, you swear by God? Okay, I'll trust you then. Because swearing by God means that even though you don't know me, you don't know my character, you don't know my virtue, I'm going to invoke a virtue you can respect, God's virtue.

And what I'm saying is that for me to default on my promise is to impugn the virtue of this one that I'm appealing to. Before God, I lie not, Paul said. That was an oath.

Or when Caiaphas told Jesus, I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. And Jesus answered, I am. He was put under oath.

For him to lie in that situation would have been to impugn the living God whose name was invoked. Now, we don't think that way so much anymore, although you still hear sometimes people swear on a stack of Bibles that so-and-so is true or whatever. Or, of course, in a court of law, we still take oaths.

You put your hand on the Bible and say, I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, so help me God. That is swearing by God. Now, some Christians feel that because of what Jesus said about swearing that they shouldn't swear an oath in court or anywhere else.

Jesus said, don't swear at all. But I think, again, they misunderstand that he himself, as I pointed out, allowed himself to be put under oath in court. Paul took oaths.

I mean, that's exactly what he did when he said, by God, God is my witness, I lie not. When he says, God is my witness, that's a form of an oath. Jesus was saying this, that oaths, although they have been used as a means of guaranteeing that someone is telling the truth, can be manipulated by an unfaithful person.

You can be unfaithful and still take oaths. And here's how they did it. You have to understand what the disciples already knew.

And we don't know that instinctively, so we have to turn to another passage to see where it is. In Matthew 23, verse 16, Jesus said, Woe to you, blind guides, who say, Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it. Fools and blind, for which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And whoever swears by the altar, they say, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.

Fools and blind, for which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and all things on it. He who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits on it.

Now, Jesus here gives us a little insight into how the Pharisees typically had manipulated this system of oaths. Everyone knew that if you swear by God, you're going to keep your oath. No man feared God so little as to swear by God's name and not keep his oath.

I mean, once you invoke God, you've got the wrath of God on you if you don't keep your oath. That's worse than the wrath of a court. That's worse than a signed contract being

broken.

Now, by the way, I might just say this, there's nothing immoral about taking oaths. In the Old Testament, God actually instructed his people to swear by his name rather than by other gods. He encouraged vows, although there are warnings about vows.

For instance, in Ecclesiastes 5, at the opening verses, Solomon warns you don't make vows if you're not going to keep them. It's better not to vow at all than to make a vow and break it. And you better keep your vows.

You see, vows are not innately immoral unless they're broken. And when Jesus said don't vow at all, he was not trying to now render the taking of vows immoral. There's nothing intrinsically immoral about taking a vow by God.

As I say, if God in the Old Testament could say, swear your oaths in the name of Jehovah, not in the name of other gods, there must be nothing wrong with swearing by God, swearing in the name of God. There's nothing intrinsically evil about it. So Jesus was getting at something else here.

What he was getting at is this. The Pharisees, it was well known, had developed, or the rabbis had developed, an elaborate system of vows, some of which they say are binding vows, others are not binding vows. Of course, if you swore by God, you'd have to keep your vow.

If you swore by the temple, that might impress people enough to think that you're going to keep your vow, but the rabbis had it all worked out. Swearing by the temple was not a binding vow. Now, swearing by the gold of the temple, that was a binding vow.

Swearing by the altar, that was not a binding vow, but swearing by the gift on the altar, that was. You could swear by the tree, by the rock, you could swear by anything you wanted to, by the mountain, but the thing is, not all vows, in the rabbis' thinking, were binding, but only a trained legal scholar would know which ones were and which were not. The average man on the street would assume if you're swearing by the temple, oh, well, I guess you're telling the truth then.

I swear by the altar in the temple. Oh, well, you certainly wouldn't do that if you weren't telling the truth. But the Pharisee is doing it, says in his heart, I didn't swear by the gold of the temple, so I don't have to keep my promise.

And what he's doing is taking a system of vows, which vows exist for the purpose of guaranteeing your veracity, but now they're taking a system of vows and making it a way of deceiving people. Yet, they found a loophole. And Jesus said, listen, don't swear by the temple, don't swear by the heaven, don't swear by the earth, don't swear by the hair of your head.

Just say yes and let it be yes. Just say no, let it be no. Don't worry about vows.

You don't need vows. Now, at the same time, when he said, do not swear at all, we have to ask ourselves, how did he mean this? Is this a command? Is he now saying that swearing oaths is in itself against the will of God, something evil, something immoral, something Christians should avoid, even if they're, for example, in court of law, asked to take a vow, just say, I'm sorry, I will not take that vow. There are people like Mennonites who don't believe you should take vows at all.

Because of this verse, you know, Mennonites, their key constitution is the Sermon on the Mount, and they take it very literally. And if they're ever asked to testify in court, and asked to swear, they'll say, I won't swear, but I will affirm. I will affirm that I'm telling the truth.

But to my mind, although I certainly love the Mennonites, and have much affinity with the Mennonites, I think that is taking these instructions in a more legalistic way than Jesus intended. Jesus is not saying, even if you're forced to take a vow, if you're, you know, don't do it. There's something wicked about vows.

Jesus was forced to take a vow, and he took the vow. He answered under oath. It's not intrinsically evil.

What he's saying is, vows, especially in the Jewish system as they were used, had become just as deceptive as not using vows. Since no one really knew, except the legal experts, which vows were binding and which were not. If a man said, yes, I'll pay you tomorrow, I swear by the altar, I'll do it.

No one knew, except the legal expert, whether that was a binding vow or not. He might be, and it isn't, according to their theories. And for that reason, a person could say that and lie.

And he'd know he was lying, and he's deliberately using a vow that he knows, but his listener doesn't know, that's not a binding vow. So he can cheat, he can lie, and still use vows. Jesus, I think, is essentially saying, listen, this whole business of taking vows, it's just become a corrupted system.

It doesn't serve any purpose. You shouldn't be a person who needs a vow. You should be a person who just says, yes, and when I say yes, I mean yes, and I'll keep my promise.

If you ask me to do it, and I say yes, then you can count on me doing it, because I'm a person of integrity. Because I am accountable to God, not to some religious system of vows. It is not this vow thing I take that makes me accountable.

It's my basic integrity before God. I'm a faithful person. And if I'm a faithful person, you don't need a vow from me to keep me honest.

Now, if you insist on a vow, I can still take one. Jesus is not forbidding that, in my opinion. Some people think he is.

But when he says, don't swear at all, I believe what he's saying is not so much, don't you dare ever swear a vow, because that's naughty. I think what he's saying is, just dispense with swearing as a habit. I mean, you don't need that.

Because there's that temptation, if you start adding vows, to think, well, maybe that vow wasn't binding. Maybe I don't have to keep my word. And you need to think about your honesty in different terms than in terms of being bound by an oath.

Your basic honesty should keep you honest, whether or not you have an oath. It's more or less giving permission to dispense with vows, and a command to be as honest all the time as if you had taken a vow. That's what he's saying.

And so he's essentially protesting, I believe, the whole system of vows, which we barely understand, because we hardly ever have occasion to take vows. The only vows that we really take in our society that I'm aware of are in court, when called to testify, and, of course, in marriage, which brings us back to the issue of divorce in verses 31 and 32. Marriage vows, we do take marriage vows.

Nothing wrong with doing that. Even though Jesus said, don't swear, he's not forbidding outright all vows. Marriage is confirmed by a covenant, by a vow.

And so his teaching is essentially expressing concern that we be honest in all our dealings. If we are, who needs vows? If people insist on a vow, we shouldn't feel like we can't give them one. But we should live as such a life that they wouldn't require a vow.

I mean, they'd say, well, you don't need to sign this. I know you. You're an honest person.

Everyone knows you. Everyone knows your honesty. A handshake will do here.

Just a promise from you is enough. You don't need to sign this contract. You don't need to make a vow.

Now, there might be people all the time who don't trust you, and you should be willing to sign the contract or make a vow or whatever it is that they're requiring. And Jesus is not saying that that's a wrong thing. He's just saying, be honest enough that when yes comes out of your mouth, yes is what you mean and what you follow up on.

When you say no, that no is what you mean and what is true and what you follow up on, that you keep to your commitment. And you don't need a vow to make you honest. But there are some situations where vows are made inappropriately, and marriage is one of them.

And that is what he's talking about when he talks about divorce here. Both when he's talking about divorce and when he's talking about vows, he's talking about basic faithfulness, basic honesty, the need to keep your promises, whether someone makes you do it or not. Under the law of Moses, it was possible in some circumstances to get out of your marriage vows.

But what circumstances legitimize this divorce action were never spelled out in the Old Testament. The only passage in the Old Testament that legislates on divorce at all is Deuteronomy 24. And of course that's the passage Jesus quotes from, which says, You have heard that it was said, If a man divorces his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

The passage is Deuteronomy 24, 1 through 4, which says, When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, then when she has departed from his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled. For that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land in which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. Now, not everything about that is clear as to God's reasoning about things, but it's very clear that God said He envisions a scenario where a man finds sufficient fault with his wife that he cannot live with her anymore, will not live with her anymore.

He gives her a writing of divorce. This is actually more merciful to the woman than what some societies, including Arab society and Jewish society of the time, apparently permitted a man to just say I divorce you three times to his wife, and then that was it. I believe the Arabs still have that policy, if I'm not mistaken, and Muslims.

I could be mistaken. But that a man does not want to live with his wife where he can simply say to her three times, I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you. But that's a verbal thing.

It may happen in the bedroom. No one may hear it. He may later say, I never said that.

And here she's gone out and married someone else. He says, that woman's still my wife. And there's no record that he really set her free.

He just uttered it. The law said, no, you can't do that. You have to write it out.

Put it in writing. Say you're divorcing her. Give it to her.

Put it in her hand. Now she's free to go and do something else. She's free to be without

you.

And so it was really merciful to the woman, although I'm sure divorce was not always carried out in a merciful manner. Certainly not. But to require that the man put it in writing was a merciful thing on God's part.

It protected her from him coming back later and saying, I never divorced you. She says, here it is, write it in writing. A verbal divorce would not have really been able to prove in some cases.

Now, therefore, Moses said, when you divorce your wife, put it in writing. The Jews took that to mean that you should divorce your wives if you find something wrong with her, and you should give her a writing of divorce. And Jesus says, you've heard it said, verse 31, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. Now think of the scenarios here.

There's a woman divorced by her husband, and it is not for the cause of sexual immorality. In other words, she has been innocent of that. She has not been adulterous.

What is the result? Well, one thing is that her husband, by divorcing her, causes her to commit adultery. How is this? How can one man cause another person to commit adultery? Well, this is not a hard causation. This is a more soft causation in the sense that it's not like the man forces her to commit adultery.

Absolutely. But rather, the society being what it was, she could not very well support herself unmarried, in all likelihood. Most women could not.

A widow would have to beg or have children to support her, or if a woman was divorced, similarly, she'd be either out on her own, she could sell herself into prostitution, she could go back to her father if he's alive, or she could remarry. In either case, if her father's not alive, in many cases that would be the case, because a lot of men divorce their older wives because they got older and the men were attracted to younger women. In many cases, the woman would be without living fathers to support them.

And therefore, they had a couple options. Maybe more, but the most accessible options would be to remarry or to go into prostitution. Either case, however, would be adultery.

Why? Because the divorce is not really recognized by God in the scenario here. No one has committed adultery here physically. The woman was divorced, though she had not committed adultery.

The husband has not committed adultery, at least in this scenario. He hasn't described

the man remarrying or committing adultery. He's just put his wife away because he doesn't love her anymore.

And so you've got two people who've been married. They're now legally divorced, but they have neither of them committed adultery. They are therefore, in God's eyes, still married.

If this woman were to go into prostitution or even remarry, she's committing adultery, because she's still married to the first husband as far as God is concerned. And if she remarries, not only is she committing adultery, but the guy who marries her is committing adultery, Jesus said. Now, all of that assumes a certain limited scenario that he has described.

Namely, there has been no adultery and the man is not said to have remarried himself. You see, if the man divorced his wife illegitimately and married, then I believe he's committing adultery. If he married another person.

He's still married to the wife that he put away. She's done nothing worthy of divorce, and so she's not, he's not free from that marriage. And his remarriage, I take to be adultery on his part.

Furthermore, she has not committed adultery initially. Her adultery did not occur before the divorce. Therefore, we have a couple who have been essentially sexually faithful to each other, but don't find living with each other pleasant, and they have been granted a legal divorce.

But a legal divorce, Jesus says, does not necessarily grant a divorce in the sight of God. Now, some people think from this teaching that there is never such a thing as a divorce in the sight of God. There are Christians who teach adamantly that God never acknowledges the legitimacy of divorce, and that even if a person is legally divorced, they are not divorced in the sight of God, and if they remarry, they are committing adultery, no matter what the circumstances.

Such people who teach these things are simply not very good readers, apparently, because Jesus said this whole scenario holds true except for the case of sexual immorality, and that exception means that none of this holds true in the case where there has been sexual immorality. He presents a scenario. A man divorces his wife.

She remarries. By doing so, she and her new husband are committing adultery. That's the scenario.

But that's only true except... that's only true when there has been no prior immorality on her part. If you bring in a different factor, she has committed sexual immorality, and that is why he divorced her, then that changes everything. For one thing, he doesn't cause her to commit adultery.

She's already done it. She may remarry because he's divorced her for immorality, but he doesn't cause her to commit adultery by doing so. He acknowledges the marriage to be broken.

She's committed adultery earlier. And it's not even clear to me from this passage necessarily by itself that her second marriage is adultery since her husband, on the basis of her earlier adultery, has divorced her. She's not married anymore.

In Deuteronomy, if a woman was put away by her husband because of some uncleanness, whatever that might be, let's say it was adultery, she can go and marry another man. It's said in Deuteronomy. There is no stigma attached to her remarrying another man under the law.

And Jesus is not necessarily modifying the law. Jesus is not throwing out the law. By the way, in none of these illustrations that he gives in the Sermon on the Mount, never does he change the law.

He simply amplifies on it. He simply shows how they are using the law to violate some higher principle that God is concerned about, namely, in this case, faithfulness. The law may permit you to divorce your wife in some cases, but for the most part, you men who are divorcing your wives are violating a basic principle of faithfulness to your original vows to your wife, and it makes your wife compromise her virginity, not her virginity, but her virtue, let's put it that way.

You divorce a virtuous wife who has never committed sexual immorality against you, and now you put her in a position where she almost has to become an adulteress. You force her to commit adultery. Now, of course, she shouldn't commit adultery, but the weight of it, in Jesus' teaching, falls on the man who put her into that situation.

She's not done anything to deserve this divorce, and now to survive she gets married again, maybe she shouldn't, maybe she should be more, you know, maybe she should just beg for a living or something, but in any case, the reason she's put in this position to have to go out and remarry and thus enter into an adulterous second relationship is because of what her husband did. And all this is true unless it's in a case of sexual immorality on her part. That changes it.

In that case, if he divorces her because of sexual immorality, then he is not guilty of causing her to commit adultery. And if there is adultery in her second marriage, it's not the husband who divorced her who causes it, because she had already committed adultery earlier. Now, this teaching, of course, in Matthew 5 has to be cross-referenced in every case when it's brought up with Matthew 19 because the same teaching comes up, but a few other details that come in that are important.

In Matthew 19, verse 3, it says, the Pharisees also came to him, testing him and saying

to him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And he answered and said to them, Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female? And said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away? And he said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. Now, notice this, verse 9 is very, very similar to Matthew 5, 32. It talks about a man divorcing his wife except for the cause of sexual immorality, but then it's different the way it ends, because in Matthew 5, 32, it does not envisage the husband who divorced her remarrying.

Here it does. If a man divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another, he commits adultery. Now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 32, it doesn't even mention the man doing the divorcing committing adultery.

It just mentions that if he divorces his wife under those circumstances, implying that she remarries, he makes her commit adultery and the wife she marries. But there's no reference there of him and any guilt he incurs in adultery. But here Jesus says if a man divorces his wife and marries another, and there's been no sexual immorality then he commits adultery.

So that adds another dimension to it. And, he says the same thing that's at the end of the other one in Matthew 5, whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. Now, this last line, whoever marries her that is divorced commits adultery, I think, I mean, there's more than one way to understand this.

And I'm afraid it's going to be impossible for me to settle it beyond question for all people. But one way to look at it is that even if the husband who divorced her remarries, she is not free to remarry. And the reason she's not free to remarry is because the man who remarried is in turn then more than one wife under the law.

And therefore for her husband to remarry her, or to remarry another woman, you know, would not be adultery for him. But Jesus said it is adultery if a man remarries and he has divorced his wife under the wrong cause. And so I believe that the other way to understand this is that he's picturing the situation like that in Matthew 5, that to marry a woman who's been divorced, when her marriage, her first marriage has not been really broken before God, there's been no sexual immorality on her part, and also none on her husband's part yet, to remarry would be wrong for her.

Now it's not really clear that this is the case. With a matter like divorce, I have to say there are many, many scenarios, and different parties are guilty in different ways, in different divorces. I believe there are divorces where there are some parties totally innocent, and other parties 100% the guilty party.

There are other divorces where both parties are somewhat guilty of making the divorce happen. Some of them even agree to it, some marriages both parties have been out having affairs and so forth, it's really hard to know who's more guilty and so forth. And therefore issues of divorce and remarriage are exceedingly complex.

And yet Jesus only says a few words, and only talks about a particular scenario. He doesn't talk about every scenario, which makes it difficult. Some people solve the difficulty by just saying, I'm going to make the few things Jesus said apply to every case.

It's that easy. That it's always wrong to marry a divorced woman. Any man who ever marries a divorced woman, under any circumstances, well, he commits adultery by doing so.

But I want to remind you of a couple of things. One is that throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is making absolutist statements that are in many cases hyperbole. Don't ever call your brother fool, or you'll be in danger of hellfire.

But Jesus called people fools. Sometimes the statement is true, sometimes it's not, maybe in the majority of cases. And in the cases where it is, it's very emphatically true.

That calling a person a fool endangers you of hellfire. Jesus talks about plucking out eyes and casting away hands, and he talks about these kinds of issues in such a way, we just have to, again, he uses hyperbole. Now, I'm not saying that we must bring the consideration of hyperbole into this discussion about divorce, but I am saying it may be necessary to do so, and it may be legitimate to do so, with the frequency of the use.

When Jesus said, if you call your brother fool, if you're angry at your brother, and yet there are exceptions. When Jesus says, don't take oaths, just say yes or no, as I said earlier, I personally don't believe that he's really being legalistic about that, I think he's just giving one scenario. There are times when you take a marriage vow, that's not a violation of anything.

There are oaths that can be taken. Later on, he says, if a person strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If a person wants to take your tunic, give him your cloak also.

He also says, give to him that asks you of you. But there are certainly times when you should not give someone something, although they ask you for it. The Bible makes that clear elsewhere.

He that does not work should not eat. And a person should not give things to their children that are bad for them, although children may well ask for them. There certainly are exceptions.

More than Jesus is naming, but he's not trying to hide the fact that there are exceptions. The points he's making, he's making emphatically. He's making absolutist, hyperbole statements in many cases.

He may be doing so in this case too. There may be instances where a divorce occurs and sexual immorality was not involved, but it is still a case of a legitimate divorce. And I say this partly because Paul allows a case like that of a Christian married to a non-Christian.

If the non-Christian is not content to dwell and departs, Paul said, let them depart. The brother or sister is not in bondage in such cases. The marriage is over.

He does not mention that there has to be sexual immorality to make that marriage end. The very desertion of one party, the unbelieving party, makes that marriage over and sets the believer free in the same sense as if there had been adultery. Are there other things besides? I don't know.

If Jesus states that in an absolute sounding way and then Paul gives an exception, doesn't that suggest that maybe the absolutism is not so absolute and that there might be some other exceptions? I don't know. I'm going to leave it before God and the individuals who have to make those decisions. I will say this.

People often ask me, what about a woman who is physically abused or the children are physically abused and they're afraid that the husband might kill them? What should a wife do? Can she divorce in that case? Well, the hard part of that comes from the variety of possibilities there. One possibility is that a woman could stay in the situation and be beaten to death. Slaves in biblical times had to do that sometimes.

They had to be subject to their masters even if they were beaten to death. Fortunately for the Christian slave, he went to heaven if he was beaten to death. Not very right treatment though.

A master should never do that, obviously, and a husband should never abuse a wife. But if he does, what should the wife do? Should she stay with him? Should she take it? Should she put her life at risk? There is an argument for doing so. There is a biblical case for doing so.

Jesus did that. When he was reviled, he reviled not. And again, when he suffered, he threatened not.

He committed himself to him that judges righteously. Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as

unto a faithful creator. They can kill the body.

Fear not him that can kill the body, but can do no more. But fear him that can kill the body and destroy the soul in hell. He that seeks to save his life will lose it.

But he that will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Now, all of these scriptures, of course, have to be taken in a context. And depending on how the context is applied, some people might say, well, this doesn't apply to a woman in an abusive situation.

Others would say it does. And I would have to leave it to the conscience of that woman, but I will say this. Although I think it a virtuous thing, to tell you the truth, I mean, I don't know that the woman should endanger the children.

And I think that if there is a violent man who is likely to kill her and the kids, a woman would be wise to separate herself from that man, put distance there, get to a safe place. But I'm saying that if there's no children and the woman is willing to commit herself to God and say, well, I'm going to stay faithful to this man. I'm going to try to win him by my submissive spirit.

And she gets killed in the process. It's a great tragedy, but it's not really a great tragedy to her. She gets to go to heaven.

And she has done something exceedingly Christ-like. But I'm not going to hold her feet to the fire on that. That's going to be between her and God.

I'll tell you this. If a woman, because of perceived danger, does not have the grace or does not feel that she has the grace to endure and leaves her husband, I'm not going to be one who insists on her going back until he's repented. I do not necessarily think, though, that divorce is an open option for her in such a case.

Although there is another way of seeing it. Since Paul said, if the unbeliever departs and is not content to dwell with her, then she's free. It has been argued, and I would say with some merit, that a man who beats his wife and abuses her and just uses her for a punchy mag might well be described as one who is not content to dwell with her.

He might not have physically left the home, but he has certainly departed from her in the sense of being a husband. He just uses her as a victim now, not as a wife. And it's depending on how one reads it or thinks of it, a woman who is physically abused to the point of being endangered, or even not to the point of being endangered, might well argue, well, this man is not content to dwell with me, obviously.

He doesn't seem like a very content individual. And therefore, she is free. There are Christians who would interpret that way.

The question, of course, is does God? That's the main question. That's all that's at issue

in the Sermon on the Mount. What does God think about this behavior? And I am willing to at least allow the possibility, since I cannot disallow it, that there may be exceptions that Jesus is not mentioning here, just as there are to when he says, Give to him that asketh you.

There are exceptions. There are times you shouldn't give. You shouldn't call your brother a fool, but there are exceptions.

There's times when a person can be called a fool. You shouldn't divorce your wife except for the cause of sexual immorality, and the woman shouldn't depart from her husband. But there might be exceptions in extremities where God says, Well, listen, my forbidding of divorce is that I do not want people to be unfaithful to their vows.

Faithfulness is the issue, and that's what God's complaint is about divorces. Men have been treacherous toward their wives. In Malachi, God hates divorce when the man has been treacherous toward his wife, and he divorces his wife in treachery.

And he hates it when a woman divorces her husband in treachery. But there are times when a woman divorcing her husband, a man divorcing his wife, might not be treachery on their part. It might be just that he has violated his vows in so many ways as to communicate that he is no longer really committed to that marriage.

He may not have actually committed sexual immorality, or she might not have. But God only knows. I would say, I'll just tell you where I stand.

I believe that even when you have grounds for divorce, it's better not to divorce. And that's the path I took. I had grounds for divorce.

My wife committed adultery, but I wouldn't divorce her. She divorced me eventually, but not until after a year and a half of her having affairs, having no relationship with me, but living in the same house, and my refusal to divorce her, although I knew I had grounds because I just felt like, I'm not going to be the one to ditch this marriage. And she did, and I was set free.

But if she had not ditched it, I would probably still be married to her today. I don't know what shape I'd be in, but I'd probably still be married to her because I simply did not, even if you have grounds for divorce, I do not favor divorce. I do not advise divorce.

And in that, I have to say there are times when a person could justly divorce and not be accused of being unfaithful because their spouse's behavior has been such as to render the person not guilty of unfaithfulness by leaving that person behind. But even where there is that just ability to do so, there is always the choice of staying true and suffering the wrong. Why not suffer the wrong, Paul said to people who were suing each other? Why not just suffer the wrong instead? And someone says, but how much wrong should a woman be required to suffer, or a man be required to suffer? Well, how many times must

I forgive? I don't know the number, but the more the better.

The more that is suffered for righteousness' sake, the better. Now, some people will think it's not suffering for righteousness' sake for a woman to stay with a battering husband, they'll say that it's suffering for stupidity's sake. But if she is staying because she feels that that is what pleases God and she's not some kind of a spineless person who is just fearful about coming and fearful about staying and fearful about leaving and fearful about everything, but she is a woman who stands before God with a confidence in her relationship with God and feels that God is pleased to have her stay, then that's not stupidity, that's righteousness.

And if she suffers for that, so be it. I suffered for righteousness in my marriage. In the mercy of God, that marriage ended without my provoking it.

But I'm not inclined to be encouraging divorce even when there's grounds, much less when there isn't. At the same time, God's sympathies may be greater than mine. And God I think hates divorce because divorce is unfaithfulness.

But there are times when it is very clear that one party has been already so unfaithful in so many ways to their marriage vows, that the other party can hardly be called unfaithful by saying, well, if that's your choice, that's your choice, I'm leaving. Now, let me say something else about this. Paul gives us some very important insights into what Jesus meant when he gave his teaching on divorce in the Sermon on the Mount.

If you'll turn to 1 Corinthians 7, in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 10 and following it says, Now to the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord. Now, when Paul says, yet not I, but the Lord, he means, this doesn't resonate with me. Jesus said this.

The Lord means Jesus. I command this, but I didn't command it. Jesus commanded this.

He's repeating what Jesus commanded when he says, this is not me, but the Lord. This is what Jesus said. A wife is not to depart from her husband, but even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband, and a husband is not to divorce his wife.

Now, since Paul is repeating what Jesus said, we must assume that he allows the exceptions that Jesus gave. He doesn't have to mention them since he is going to give the church the benefit of the doubt that the Christians are not committing adultery against each other, so they're not going to be giving each other grounds for divorce. I mean, there would be exceptions.

Even Jesus acknowledged the exceptions, and Paul is simply trying to recap what Jesus said and apply it to the people of this church, assuming they are not adulterers. A man should not divorce his wife, and she should not depart from her husband. If she's already done so, she should be reconciled with him.

If she can't, she should remain unmarried. All of this is Paul's way of recapping what the Lord said, what Jesus said. He's clearly speaking of the Sermon on the Mount and the teaching on divorce.

But, of course, he's not repeating every detail. And the details he's not repeating, we should not think that Paul is ignoring or refusing to acknowledge, but rather that he assumes they know these details. He assumes they know what Jesus said, and therefore he doesn't have to repeat everything and every exception and so forth.

In general, certainly the teaching of Jesus was that people should not divorce. People should stay faithful to their marriage vows. That Jesus allowed an exception is not Paul's not denying, but it's just not under discussion here.

But then he says in verse 12, But to the rest, I, not the Lord, say, if a brother has a wife who does not believe and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, etc.

Verse 15, But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. Now there's more, but let me just extract what I'm trying to get across here.

In verse 12 he begins to address married Christians who are married to non-Christians. He describes them as the rest. Notice verse 12 To the rest, I say.

And the rest are Christians married to non-Christians. Clearly. If a brother has a wife who does not believe or if a woman has a husband who does not believe.

The rest are these mixed marriages. These unequally of marriages. Christian marriage and non-Christian.

But when you say the rest, you're bringing a contrast to some previously mentioned group. If I say, listen, I want all the girls to leave the room. The rest of you stay here.

The rest means in contrast to the ones I spoke about earlier. The girls. I want the girls to leave the room.

The rest means whoever is not one of them. Now when Jesus says to the rest, and he means Christians married to non-Christians, then who are the first group being addressed? Must be Christians married to Christians. All the people he's addressing are Christians.

But there's two categories. There's Christians married to Christians. And then there's Christians married to non-Christians.

The first group certainly must be Christians married to Christians because the second

group is the rest. Who are not addressed in the first group. Is that clear enough? Now, when Paul says to the rest, I speak, not the Lord, it means that Jesus didn't speak on this subject.

I'll have to go ahead and tell you what I believe he would say because he didn't talk about this. Now, you can easily see that Paul is saying that when Jesus gave his instruction on divorce, he was talking about people married to believers. Believers married to believers.

He never addressed the subject of believers married to unbelievers. Can you see that that's what Paul's saying? Paul says Jesus didn't say anything about this bit of believers married to unbelievers, so I'll have to say something about that. Not the Lord.

But the Lord did speak to the other group. Believers married to believers. Now, see, Jesus, we have to assume Jesus' disciples not only believed, but their wives believed also.

They were all Jews. They were all faithful Jews. And in all likelihood, the wives believed that Jesus was the Messiah just like their husbands did.

We have to assume that because Paul assumes it. Paul assumes that what Jesus said on the subject of divorce applies to Christians married to Christians. When it comes to the other subject, the rest of them, the Christians and the non-Christians, Jesus didn't discuss that, so Paul had to add his own embellishments there.

Now, when we see that, then what we realize is that when we're reading the Sermon on the Mountain, this talk about divorce and remarriage, we're talking about Christians married to Christians. According to Paul, Jesus' words do not apply to Christians married to non-Christians because Jesus didn't have any disciples who fit that category. He was teaching his disciples.

Now, if that is true, then that adds a whole important new dimension to the whole moral issue of divorce in modern times. You see, in Jesus' society, all of his disciples were Jewish people married to Jewish people and non-believers. That's not the case now.

A lot of believers, unfortunately, are married to non-believers here in this country. Some of the divorces that take place, though there's been no sexual immorality as a part of them, nonetheless would be legitimate because they are believers married to non-believers. If Jesus made strict statements about certain situations, the situation he was talking about was the cases of Christians married to Christians.

Paul's statements that a wife, if she leaves her husband, should be reconciled or remain unmarried is made to Christians married to Christians. If there's no reconciliation because the husband's not a Christian, then there's no command for her to remain unmarried because no reconciliation is advocated in that case. But this is a complex

subject, much too complex for us to do justice to in the 45 minutes or whatever we gave it here.

And we do have to quit because we're out of time, but I do have additional tapes on the subject of divorce and remarriage where I deal with some of this. And we're going to have to leave off there. Suffice it to say that his teaching about divorce and about oaths emphasizes the fact that God is concerned about faithfulness, not legal loopholes.

Legal loopholes to divorce your wife or legal loopholes to not keep your promise. Do not impress God. He's looking for honest people, people who are faithful because that's loving.

And love is the fulfillment of the law.