

**Red Letters | The Sermons of Jesus Christ**  
**Two Kinds of Righteousness (2): Sex Etc.**  
**Matthew 5.20, 27-37**  
**2.27.22**

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

31 "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; 32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes ' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

We thought that since today is the picnic and a less formal day...that we'd stick with an easy passage of Scripture... and NO thorny or controversial matters.

We're looking at the CORE of Jesus Christ's teachings, the most famous sermon ever preached, The Sermon on the Mount.

The great Welsh preacher, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, had his 60 sermons compiled into a book. I noticed that in the opening paragraphs, he said that if not for a very strong sense that God was leading him to this series he would NEVER have chosen it on his own. I get it.

The Scottish scholar F.F. Bruce (d.1980) wrote a contemporary classic called The Hard Sayings of Jesus, 70 puzzling things Jesus Christ said that leave modern readers confused and each of today's three paragraphs get their own chapter in that book.

What should we think and how should we speak and act about adultery (7th Commandment), marriage, divorce and RE-marriage and truthful communication – on this picnic Sunday... like a walk in the park.

So let's look at these issues under three headings:

- 1) The Complexity of the Issues
- 2) The Simplicity of the Issues
- 3) Please Get Me A Box of Tissues

When our denomination formed in 1973 and eight years later a formal request came (from a church in the South) requesting that we adopt a position advocating total abstinence from beverage alcohol. The study group answered in the negative. The report is about one half of one page.

In 1992 another study group was commissioned to write a report on Divorce and Remarriage... That report came in at 113 pages.

Here Jesus Christ is fulfilling the Law...restoring it to the original intent of when He delivered the Law on the Mountain...and now 1500 years later He comes physically, the God-Man, to another mountain where He will put the heart back into the Law after so many generations have neutralized God's Law so that people could keep it...even without God.

They had (and we do the same maneuvers) they'd learned to do the Law...often independent of God as a way of keeping God from intruding on their lives (as long as we obey, the mean Deity will leave us alone) and they keep it only externally with no bearing on their motives, intentions.

Now Jesus quotes that Law – the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and the Law of Deuteronomy and Leviticus forbidding adultery (7th Commandment) and forbidding divorce and the making of bad vows and Jesus – far from nullifying God's commands – is giving His disciples the heart and true intent of the Law... AND He is introducing a New Covenant, a new way of obeying what God wants for us... His conception of the Good Life...doing God's will by God's power.

Jesus is filling the Law with meaning...and is giving His people a new basis for doing it...

I'm sure you can see that each of these three issues is extremely complicated...there are so many sub-headings both in that culture and in our own. Let me look at SOME of those complexities.

First, a theological complication: St Paul said that the Law (in any form) tends to stir up in us a desire to do what the Law forbids – The commandment said, "You shall not envy" but sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me envy of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

(Rom 7. 😊)

The sign says, "Don't walk on the grass..." and now all I can think about is walking on that grass – the commandment stirred up my desire to disobey.

So... why talk about what we shouldn't do? It just makes us want to do it! AND the Law doesn't grant us the power to KEEP it!

Another doctrinal difficulty is that Jesus says we will not be judged ONLY for doing the deed but for wanting to do the deed... "everyone who looks at a woman with lust..." It's NOT that looking is as bad as going through with it (there ARE degrees of sin) but that even a lecherous, lustful look IS sin and damnable.

And how about the fact that God Himself is a Divorcee? He gave His unfaithful Wife, Israel, divorce papers. Here's Jeremiah CH 3 (God speaking): "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce..." (v.8; see also Hosea 1.9)

Second, are our own societal sins. As we think about adultery... and lust... we're reminded that we live in a sex-saturated culture. Pornography accounts for an extremely high percentage of overall Internet traffic.

Divorce rates are slightly falling as is teen pregnancy and some other indicators but the rates are still tremendously troubling. We use sex to sell everything.

And speaking of selling...the last paragraph has to do with truthful communication. I'm sure there's always been false advertising and distrust of the government and what leaders tell us... but we seem to be breathing the air of UNTRUTHFUL communications today. Trust in other people and in our institutions is at a low.

Third, a pastoral complication: what are we to say to people in our own flock who face deep struggles with lust, sex-addiction, victims of sexual abuse, people who have failed, people who are divorced and remarried... Is there hope in Christ and what will repentance look like? How will we counsel them...and NOT "them" ...but "US" ...one another because is anyone untarnished or unaffected to a degree?

Then a spate of miscellaneous complexities... Like, what do we say to single people? Fewer are marrying and many are marrying later. There seems to be no wiggle-room here... Sex outside of marriage is wrong and is damnable... Jesus speaks in very stark terms about hell... He uses hyperbole (at least I think it's hyperbole when He says, "Its better to tear out your eye or amputate your hand...rather than be thrown into hell if those body parts lead one to sin...")

And can we make vows...when Jesus says NOT to... what about being sworn in at court...at your wedding ...at church (membership...baptismal vows)? Are we allowed to use contracts or only say, "Yes or No"?

AND one last point here – it's only a short passage but today (on PICNIC day!) we're taking all three! That complicates things even more!

But let's move now from The Complexity of the Issues to The Simplicity of the Issues... Jesus Christ is speaking TRUTH and He puts things very plainly. He's telling us about the Good Life and warning us to avoid what distorts and destroys life (and that's good!)

But the issue under all these issues is a kind of righteousness that even the MOST spiritual and religious people cannot generate, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mat 5.20)

And even though we're looking at three very complex issues...underneath is only ONE – if we boil it all the way down. And that one issue is: how to be a whole person.

How, as we move toward the end of this chapter, and the climactic words "Therefore you are to be COMPLETE, as your heavenly Father is COMPLETE" (48) HOW, according to Jesus Christ, how is this declaration or righteousness (a different quality or right-ness) how will it make those who receive God's VERDICT of innocence and RIGHT – how will it make us people of integrity?

How will we have and know sexual integrity and marital integrity and integrity in our speech and dealings with others?

We normally think of integrity as meaning trustworthy or honest morally upright but the word is from the same root as a mathematical term: INTEGER meaning a whole number.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus Christ's program for making people WHOLE... integrated...complete.

We think of the 86th Psalm "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name. (11) "

This is our problem – we're divided in our hearts. We are (as per Augustin and Luther) "incurvatus in se." We're curved in on ourselves. Our souls are ingrown.

And Jesus Christ is saying, "This is how – My blessed people...Blessed are the poor in spirit...those who mourn...the gentle...those who hunger and thirst for a righteousness from OUTSIDE themselves..." MY PEOPLE will come to be integrated – what they have to do will become what they WANT to do...

When I fulfill all righteousness and settle the agreement, the eternal covenant, when AS A MAN I LIVE according to all the Law that My people have broken and continue to break...and when I die under the penalty My people deserve – when I do the HUMAN part of the covenant and the DIVINE part of the covenant... When I rise from the dead and pour out My Spirit ON you and IN you – He will begin to remake you and RE-unite you as I made you to be.

I will be, on YOUR BEHALF, the One King with clean hands and a pure Heart able to ascend the mountain of the Lord – no immoral or impure lusts (think of the way Jesus Christ dealt with women – like the Samaritan Woman at the Well [John 4] or the Immoral Woman – "Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" [Luke 7.44]) Simon judged her with disgust – Jesus forgave and loved her with pure compassion and care.

He is the Faithful Husband who, though He divorced His chronically unfaithful bride... He did it to save her from the brutal users who victimized her again and again... And Jesus Christ has come for her...for His broken Bride... to rescue her and reward her for what HE HAS DONE – the Perfect Husband!

And He is the One who vows...makes an oath, a covenant, and keeps it perfectly ...He speaks True Words you can bank on completely...He IS the TRUTH!

Now... The Complexity of the Issues, The Simplicity of the Issues and LAST Please Get Me A Box of Tissues...

Why do I need tissues, you ask?

Well...there's so much more to say about this passage... There are so many questions left unanswered... Probably we could cover some of them in a class setting... I'm sure we have people who are dealing with sex-addictions...or want to know about remarrying after a divorce or feel weird about raising their hand and swearing in court... But I can say a few things about a few things.

Martin Luther said we can't keep the birds from flying over our heads but we can keep them from nesting in our hair... In the same way, we all have impure thoughts... but we can call upon the Spirit of God who is OURS by faith in Christ to liberate us from lustful thoughts. We MUST learn to rely on His power because to give in to a life of lust is torment now and forever.

The sinfulness of sin is a real sub-text here. Do anything you have to extricate yourself from situations and people that tempt you to sin sexually. Sin is not just behavior but a matter of the heart... and the only one who can change and empower our hearts for purity is the Spirit of Holiness.

Romans 8.13: "if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." The way we welcome His sin-killing ministry in our lives is to come again and again to put repentant faith to work on Jesus Christ.

If you are divorced and are troubled by that part of your past...come talk to me...I'll recommend some materials for you to read. I'm NOT a hardliner that some in our circles can be and the reason I'm not is because I think Jesus Christ was primarily telling MEN to stop using what Moses said to keep women living in fear and insecurity in that culture...

Last, this all has to be done and lived in community. Phil will lead a short 8 week long group on marriage starting April 20th – a great opportunity to invite people too.

And go to the picnic...I mean meet people...in time you may trust people enough to really share your struggles and help one another toward Kingdom Integrity... If you're a hit-and-runner... Please consider going a little deeper with us...take a class...join a group...become a member...it'll help you like you've never imagined... AND GO TO THE PICNIC!

Let's pray.