

**Study Notes: Matthew 5:27-32**  
**May 5, 2024: “Jesus Deals with Difficult Topics”**  
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**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.**

- Once again, Jesus addressed another topic by first quoting from the Law of Moses (“You have heard it said...”), then by elevating the teaching and speaking to the heart of the matter (“But I tell you...”).
- Jesus quoted from Exodus 20:14 regarding adultery, but then spoke to the heart of the matter, saying that God is not simply concerned with people having sex outside of their marriage, but also with hearts that see women as objects of lust.
  - The Greek word translated as *lustfully* means “to covet, desire, long for.” This is not a simple glance, but a continued look with intention to take someone as an object to be used to gratify one’s desire.
  - The New American commentary explains how Jesus’ teaching can apply to our lives, “Christians must recognize those thoughts and actions which, long before any overt sexual sin, make the possibility of giving in to temptation more likely, and they must take dramatic action to avoid them.”
- Jesus used hyperbolic language to speak to the serious nature of this sin, and highlighted who is responsible for it. The sin of lust cannot be blamed on the other person, but the onus falls on the person who is lusting. Jesus suggested that it would be better to gouge out the right eye or cut off the right hand rather than willingly use them to commit sin.
  - The eye was considered the window to the heart, and most responsible for the sin of lust. The right eye was particularly valuable, therefore to gouge it out highlighted how serious sin should be dealt with. Cutting off the right hand was sometimes a punishment for theft, so Jesus may have been identifying this sin as a type of stealing. Some scholars also surmise that the right hand may be a euphemism for the male sexual organ; thus Jesus was saying to take great care to keep yourself from sin and to cut it out of your life.
  - The Faithlife Study Bible notes, “Jesus uses this illustration to emphasize the way that sin stands between people and God. He also demonstrates the desperate need for a person, through the power of God, to rid their life of sin. Jesus is showing that for many people their desire for sin is so powerful that it keeps them from having relationship with God and thus leads to them experiencing God’s judgment and wrath.”
  - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary adds, “Cutting off or gouging out the offending part is a way of saying that Jesus’ disciples must deal radically with sin. Imagination is a God-given gift; but if it is fed dirt by the eye, it will be dirty. All sin, not least sexual sin, begins with the imagination. Therefore, what feeds the imagination is of maximum importance in the pursuit of kingdom righteousness.”

**“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

- Another issue that involves relationships is that of divorce. Jesus introduced this topic with the same formula (see the first note above), this time quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1. However, rather than simply affirm what Moses taught, Jesus set the standard even higher, saying that divorce should not happen for any and every reason (as was the custom of Jewish men), only for sexual immorality.
  - In a sense, by this statement, Jesus entered the already happening debate regarding divorce in Jewish teaching. Some teachers taught that it could happen for any and every reason, while others held the line that divorce should only happen in cases of adultery.
  - When Jesus taught on divorce later in Matthew, He made the statement that divorce was permitted by the Law of Moses as a concession by God because of the hardness of people’s hearts, but it is not God’s intention for people. (Matthew 19:8-9).
  - The New American Commentary explains, “Jesus never commands divorce but only permits it if all attempts at reconciliation have failed because he recognizes that the adultery has already undermined one of the most fundamental elements of a marriage — sexual exclusivity.”
- Jesus spoke to the serious nature of this issue by explaining that divorce leads to a form of adultery. The New American Commentary explains, “Jesus maintains that the divorce *itself* creates adultery — metaphorically, not literally — through infidelity to the lifelong, covenantal nature of marriage.”
  - The New American Commentary gives some insight into the application of this teaching for Christians today, “There is no indication here that a second marriage, even following an illegitimate divorce, is seen as permanently adulterous. Divorced Christians who have remarried should not commit the sin of a second divorce to try to resume relations with a previous spouse (see again Deut 24:1–4) but should begin afresh to observe God’s standards by remaining faithful to their current partners.”
- If adultery must be dealt with seriously (see verses above and notes), then marriage and divorce are serious issues that should be handled with great care and not the same callous and flippant attitude that was sometimes taken by men in Jesus’ culture.
  - Jesus highlighted the value of women in this teaching, reminding men that by their callous attitudes, women, who are made in the image of God, can become objects and victims by a man’s sinful attitudes and actions.