

# Lust, Temptation, and Divorce

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## Matthew 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said,

‘You shall not **commit adultery** [*moicheuein*].’ [Exod 20:14; Dt 5:18; Lev 20:10]

<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that

everyone who **looks at a woman** in order to **covet/desire** [*epithymein*] her, [Exod 20:17; Dt 5:21] has already committed adultery [*moicheuein*] with her in his heart.

<sup>29</sup> If your **right eye** causes you to sin [*skandalizein*], tear it out and throw it away. [Mt 18:8-9]

For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your **whole body** be thrown into hell (*gehenna*).

<sup>30</sup> And if your **right hand** causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your **whole body** go into hell (*gehenna*).

<sup>31</sup> “It was also said,

‘Whoever **divorces his wife**, let him give her a **certificate of divorce**.’ [Dt 24:1, 3]

<sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife,

except on the ground of sexual immorality [*porneia*], makes her commit adultery [*moicheuein*], and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery [*moicheuein*].”

## Exodus 20: 14, 17 (The Ten Commandments: no. 7 and no. 10)

<sup>14</sup> “You shall not **commit adultery** [*moicheuein*].” ...

<sup>17</sup> “You shall not **covet** [*epithymein*] your neighbor’s house; you shall not **covet** [*epithymein*] your neighbor’s **wife**, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

## Romans 7:7-8

<sup>7</sup> What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is **to covet** [*epithymein*] if the law had not said, “**You shall not covet** [*epithymein*].”<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness [*epithymia*].

## Deuteronomy 24:1-4

<sup>1</sup> “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,<sup>2</sup> and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife,<sup>3</sup> and the latter man dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce ... and sends her out of his house,...<sup>4</sup> then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife ...”

## Matthew 19:3-8

<sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”

<sup>4</sup> He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female [Gen 1:27],<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ [Gen 2:24]?<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

<sup>7</sup> They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” [Dt 24:1] <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”

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## **Jesus’ Antitheses: “But I Say to You...”**

In Jesus’ remarkable teaching he calls disciples to a righteousness that’s beyond and radically different from the scribes and Pharisees. Their focus was law application. Jesus affirms the law and prophets, but asserts that legal rulings don’t move us to true righteousness. Jesus uses hyperbole and serious humor to show that what matters to God can’t really be enforced by legal prescriptions and court rulings: anger, forgiveness, a faithful heart, love.

The law is the management of sin and brokenness – just how far can you go before you must be excluded, punished? What’s lawful? Jesus calls us to a vision of God’s heart and will – what is beautiful, mature, right, perfect? Jesus knows people are broken, but he is not concerned with setting a boundary within the brokenness, but calling to excellence.

## **Adultery, Lust, Coveting, Desire**

Like murder (5:21), adultery is far from God’s excellence. In law it’s a crime against a husband, enforceable in court with death penalty (Jn 8:5). Jesus speaks of looking at a woman as if it were the same crime. He aims for the reality protected by the law, unity in marriage.

What is Jesus condemning? He uses the Greek verb *epithymein* – “to desire, covet, lust.” It is the word used in the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment: You shall not covet.... The translation “lust” in English can suggest that Jesus is condemning sexual attraction as such. Rather the emphasis is on a man treating a woman as property to be coveted, possessed, controlled for his desires. The demeaning of women in that society was always rejected by Jesus.

Sexual attraction is a powerful force created by God to bring about the union, delight, and fulfillment of two people committed to each other in marriage. We sing love songs! It is not to be used to manipulate people (sex sells) or for power plays among people.

## **What Do You Throw Away?**

Again in 5:29-30 Jesus uses irony and hyperbole to challenge disciples. Think radically about anything that gets in the way of reaching the excellence, beauty, maturity of full adulthood as a child of God. Don’t settle for legal sin-management. Get rid of blockages.

Jesus sees the stumbling blocks (*skandala*) often in ourselves, as close as our right eye or right hand. Like the log in the eye, the anger in the heart, the desire for what we don’t have. What threatens is the garbage dump (*gehenna*) for our whole body (whole self). Jesus says, dump any stumbling block in yourself. Don’t settle for less than the best.

## **Divorce and Sin Management**

What Jesus says about divorce is often read legalistically, because of our own *skandala*. In Jesus’ day, divorce was in the husband’s power by simply writing a certificate. This is the reverse side of the “coveting” – the power to reject. Certificate makes it all right.

The divorce draws everyone involved into the breaking of the marriage commitment. The man forces his wife into it. Another marriage seals the break of the first.

Jesus is not changing to a more stringent law, but calling disciples to serious commitment.