

Session 09 Honoring Marriage and Our Commitments (Mt. 5:31-37)

I. REVIEW

- A. Jesus calls us to live out the **8 Beatitudes** (5:3-12) as we **resist 6 temptations** (5:21-48), and **pursue 5 kingdom activities** (6:1-18) that position our hearts to freely receive more grace. The 8 Beatitudes are like 8 flowers in the “garden of our heart” that God wants to fully blossom. These flowers are cultivated as we “weed our garden” by resisting 6 temptations (5:21-48) and as we “water our garden” by pursuing 5 kingdom activities (6:1-18).
- B. In this session, we cover the next two temptations that must be resisted. They are closely related.
 - 1. The temptation to disregard the sanctity of marriage—covenant breaking (5:31-32)
 - 2. The temptation to not keep our word and agreements—commitment breaking (5:33-37)

II. DISREGARDING THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE (MT. 5:31-32)

³¹*Furthermore it has been said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.”*
³²*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.” (Mt. 5:31-32)*

- A. We resist the temptation to disregard the sanctity of marriage—covenant breaking (5:31-32). The Pharisees taught that the important issue related to divorce was to go through the “proper legal procedure” to obtain a legal certificate of divorce. They focused on the legality of the process.
- B. The physical union of marriage supersedes the legal certificate that the Pharisees were focused on. Jesus does not recognize legal divorce as ending a marriage in God’s sight. The reason the remarriage is called adultery is because He considers the previous marriage to still be valid.
- C. The sanctity of marriage is a very important kingdom value. Therefore, divorce and remarriage are only permitted for two reasons—adultery and desertion. The prevailing Protestant view is that remarriage after divorce is biblically sanctioned in cases where divorce occurs after adultery or desertion. This is the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith.
- D. In Matthew 5, Jesus does not give a comprehensive teaching on divorce and remarriage. He does not address the many pastoral issues related to divorce and remarriage, but He focuses on the foundational principle related to the sanctity of the physical bond of marriage. It is important to Jesus that we honor the marriage covenant and be loyal in all relationships.
- E. There are two components in establishing a marriage or in ending one. First, a covenant is made between a man and a woman, with witnesses, authorized by the state. Second, is the physical consummation of the marriage in becoming one flesh. Sexual union by itself does not constitute a marriage unless vows are exchanged in a legal way. A legal divorce does not end a marriage in God’s eyes because the physical bond is not broken. In other words, for a marriage covenant to end in God’s eyes the legal commitment must be ended and the physical bond must be broken.

- F. Jesus' primary teaching on divorce and remarriage is in Matthew 19:3-9 (Mal. 2:14-16; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-15, 27, 39). For a more complete presentation of this subject see my handout called **Divorce and Remarriage** at MikeBickle.org.
- G. The place in which Jesus gives us the most detail on divorce and remarriage is in Matthew 19.
***⁸He said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives..."⁹Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."* (Mt. 19:8-9)**
- H. ***Immorality:*** Jesus gave only one reason for divorce—sexual immorality (v. 9). The Greek word is *porneia*; it refers to various acts of immorality including adultery and other acts of immorality. The biblical basis for divorce is "acts" of immorality (not just thoughts). In other words, viewing pornography is not a biblical basis for divorce unless it is acted out in physical ways.
- I. Whoever ***first*** violates the physical bond of the marriage covenant, by having sexual intercourse with one who is not their spouse, breaks the covenant and thus, commits adultery. Jesus taught that any who remarry (without adultery breaking their previous marriage) commits adultery. They commit an ***act*** of adultery by remarrying, but are not in a ***permanent state*** of adultery.
- J. Anyone who divorces his wife *causes* her to commit adultery (Mt. 5:32). There are two unspoken implications behind this statement. First, that he is never involved in another sexual relationship and second, she will be forced by economic pressures to get remarried.
³²Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. (Mt. 5:32)
- K. ***Desertion for the faith:*** Paul encountered a new situation in the conversion of Gentiles as the gospel went to the nations. Certain homes were divided due to only one spouse being converting to faith in Jesus. This new situation was the context for a second exception for divorce and remarriage due to circumstances that Jesus did not address. It is for those who are deserted for the faith. The deserted spouse is not bound to the marriage covenant.
¹⁵But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. (1 Cor. 7:15)
- L. ***A converted spouse*** was not to leave their unconverted spouse. The converted spouse ***sanctifies*** the family by influencing them through being a vessel of grace in their home (1 Cor. 7:12-14).
- M. The grace of God is available to empower a divorced believer to be single and live in purity. Wrestling with the difficulties of remaining single is far better than committing adultery.
- N. Believers who violate biblical principles in remarriage must continue in the marriage, but should acknowledge that the new marriage involved an act of adultery. It should be confessed to God with the assurance of His forgiveness. Staying in the marriage is God's will for the couple. A physical union has been formed and it is now sacred to God and He can still bless them.

III. REFUSING TO MAKE FALSE COMMITMENTS (MT. 5:33-37)

³³ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. (Mt. 5:33-37)

- A. Jesus taught His disciples on the importance of resisting the temptation to not keep our word and agreements—commitment breaking (5:33-37). He did not quote a specific law, but referred to the Pharisees’ summary of several laws (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 10:20; 23:21-24). Jesus was not correcting or changing a Mosaic law, but was restoring its original meaning.
- B. The Pharisees distorted their application of the third commandment (Ex. 20:7). They taught that the main issue was to keep oaths *in God’s name* instead of keeping all of our commitments. They argued that the law forbade using *God’s name* in vain, but not in making commitments in vain.
⁷You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain... (Ex. 20:7)
- C. They saw this command as forbidding profanity, not dishonesty. Therefore, they developed a new system for making vows. They taught that only vows made with God’s name were binding. They shifted the attention from the need to keep the vow to the formula used in making it. The original intent in God’s heart was to honor God’s name and be truthful in what we say. The Pharisees distinguished between vows that were binding and vows that were not binding. They made vows by the creature instead of by God. They had no problem in swearing falsely.
- D. They established new ways to make vows, by swearing not by the name of God, but by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or the temple. The obligation to keep the vow depended on the nature of the object sworn by (Mt. 23:16). They viewed swearing evasively as a way to lie, yet keep the law.
- E. The purpose of swearing in God’s name was ordained to restrict man’s tendency to lie. Oaths were to be restricted to very serious occasions. The Jews allowed the use of oaths for personal conversations instead of reserving them for the legal courts or between people to end disputes.
- F. In Scripture, oaths are permitted and necessary. They are to be used in formal and legal settings. What Jesus commands is that we not use oaths in personal conversation. Thus, the legitimate use of oaths is to serve godly purposes and not ungodly purposes. (NOTE: Divorce is allowed because of *hardness of heart* and swearing is because of *untruthfulness*).
- G. Jesus testified under oath in a legal setting before the Sanhedrin. He had refused to answer His accusers until the high priest put Him under an oath; then Jesus answered (Mt. 26:63-64). Paul used oaths calling God to witness (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; 1 Thes. 2:5, 10; Phil. 1:8).
⁶³Jesus kept silent. The high priest...said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ...!” ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, “It is as you said.” (Mt 26:63-64)

- H. ***Do not swear at all:*** Jesus was not referring to legal settings in this command, but to our ordinary conversations with people. He did not intend this command to be taken without any limitations, but qualified it by telling us to not swear by created things (v. 34-36). If we swear by heaven, it is His throne; if by earth, it is His footstool. To make an oath by our head is to swear by that which is under His control. The proof is that we are incapable of changing our hair color! Jesus is saying that every oath is an ultimate reference to God. Thus, we do not escape the seriousness of an oath by omitting to use God's name since all oaths are to be honored.
- I. ***Let your "Yes" be "Yes":*** Jesus calls for truthfulness and integrity in our commitments. People of integrity do not need oaths and should refuse them unless required by an authority.
- J. Some people ***promote themselves in a false way*** by exaggerating their commitments. They present themselves as one who will keep their commitments to show up to do work, attend a meeting, give money, solve a problem, run an errand, or spend time with someone, etc.
- K. Our word is our bond. Thus, ***to exaggerate our commitments is to lie*** by giving a false impression as to how much others can rely on us to do what we said.
- L. We can operate in a ***spirit of manipulation*** if we promote ourselves in a false way. We do this by portraying ourselves as more committed than what we will follow through on. Someone may say, "I'm committed to this and that," so that others will accept or applaud them for that commitment.
1. However, if over the next months they do not follow through consistently, then it becomes clear that they presented themselves in a way that was not based on truth.
 2. Some deliberately ignore their commitments and seek to hide them and are evasive about the truth when confronted. Jesus calls us to resist this kind of falsehood in our lifestyle and to live out the truth of what we say.
- M. We are disciples of the One who is "the Truth" (Jn. 14:6).
- N. When we do not follow through on what we say, ***integrity demands that we acknowledge it*** to those we committed to. This applies to our marriage, children, workplace, friends, financial obligations, ministry situations, etc. This is to walk out a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle.
- O. The Spirit is restoring integrity in the Church and raising up people who will keep their word.
- ¹Who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? ²He who... speaks the truth in his heart... ⁴He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. (Ps. 15:1-4)***
- ³Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not...sworn deceitfully. (Ps. 24:3-4)***