

## Lesson 7

# Being Faithful

### Introduction:

Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount teaching the family values in the Kingdom of God. He couples His next topic adultery . . . with divorce.

### Reading the Scripture:

**Being Faithful**  
**The Sermon on the Mount**  
**Matthew 5:27-32**

*Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”*

You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you;<sup>1</sup> for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you;<sup>2</sup> for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. And it was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

### Context:

Many people today do not have a good biblical understanding of what adultery is. Most would simply say that adultery is, “when a married person engages in sexual relations with another who is not their spouse.” While this is true, it certainly doesn't express the full essence of what Jesus is talking about.

The Hebrew word for adultery is “na'aph” and it means to **break wedlock**. And we see that this is the focus of Jesus' teaching as He directly links the subject of adultery with **divorce**, which is also a breaking of wedlock. Adultery involves more than just improper sexual relations. It constitutes breaking a **covenant relationship**.

So before adultery can occur a “covenant relationship” must already be in place. Covenant relationships come in several types with marriage being one of them. The Bible also speaks of people being in covenant with God; the Jewish people in the Mosaic Covenant and Christians in the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Covenants are comprised of several elements, as we shall discover in the next lesson of this book.

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<sup>1</sup> **If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you.** “Stop envying”. (Desiring what is not yours)

<sup>2</sup> **If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you.** “Stop stealing”. (Taking what is not yours)

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew name for the “New Covenant” is “Brit Hadashah”. A more in depth look at the New Covenant and how Christians participate in it can be found in my books entitled “Christianity 101” and “Understanding Go Better”.

Marriage is common and generally understood by everyone. So Jesus uses adultery in marriage to illustrate how covenants are broken and that breaking **any** covenant is equivalent to adultery. He outlines the steps to committing adultery so they serve as warning signs to the disciples.

Just as adultery occurs in a marital relationship it can also occur in a spiritual relationship. When adultery occurs in a spiritual relationship it is called **apostasy**, falling away or idolatry. Three prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, declared that the Israelites were committing adultery concerning their covenant with God. And in the book of James, Christians are accused of the same thing. *You **adulteresses**, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)* Let's take a closer look at the covenant of marriage and how wedlock is broken.

Marriage is **public** statement of **oneness**. It is the act of a man and a woman becoming one physically, emotionally and spiritually. It involves an agreement or covenant between the two. They pledge their lives to one another, living together in union and showing favor towards one another. Marriage requires vows, oaths or promises to be given and God is witness to them.

Divorce is also a public statement that there is a separation or **cutting** apart of the two lives that were joined in marriage. It is the **final** act of breaking of wedlock or a breaking of oneness. It indicates that the couple will not dwell together in union or show favor towards one another after the divorce occurs.

When a married person engages in sexual relations with another who is not their spouse that person is committing adultery. According to Webster's Dictionary the word adulterate means: to corrupt, debase or make **impure** by the addition of a foreign or inferior substance. So when one of the spouses engages in sexual intercourse with someone besides their marriage partner the marriage becomes mixed or impure. Since the marriage no longer exists in its original state there are **grounds** for divorce. However, the marriage does not have to end in divorce if the offended party **forgives** the other and the couple is **reconciled** to one another. Their marriage has been restored and there has been no breaking of wedlock by divorce.

According to Jesus, adultery also occurs upon **remarriage** after a divorce for a reason other than unchastity. In other words, the new marriage will be made corrupt, debased and impure by the **addition** of a foreign or inferior substance. Remember, if adultery was the grounds for the divorce the marriage had **already** been corrupted, debased and made impure. Jesus said, *“And it was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”*

The Pharisees were well aware of the role that divorce plays in the issue of adultery and questioned Jesus on it. They wanted to know whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife at all. A full account of Jesus' reply is found in Mark 10:3-12. *“And He answered and said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ And they said, ‘Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.’*

**NOTE:** Under the Law of Moses there are four grounds for divorce. The first three are neglecting to provide 1) **food**, 2) **clothing** and 3) conjugal **love** and the fourth is committing adultery. These four obligations parallel the vows exchanged by couples in Jewish marriages. By the way, these four were common in most societies during Jesus' day.

*But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' And in the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'"* The Apostle Paul reinforces this view in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

An interesting point arose when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery<sup>4</sup> to Jesus. What was this act of adultery? Most believe that she was a married woman caught in the act of having sexual relations with a man. If this were the case why wasn't the man stoned as well, since it was the law in Israel?<sup>5</sup> The most likely scenario is this. The woman probably divorced her first husband and was in the process of marrying her second husband, who was a single man. She was caught in the act of committing adultery at the wedding ceremony when she was being remarried.

The second part of this story is equally interesting. Let's look at what happened and how Jesus handled it.

*"Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do you say?" They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. (John 8:5-6)*

Perhaps Jesus wrote Jeremiah 9:2, which God spoke through the prophet concerning all of Israel. *For all of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. (Jeremiah 9:2)*

*But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. (John 8:7-8)*

Then perhaps Jesus wrote Psalm 32:1, which was written by King David after committing adultery with Bathsheba. *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!*

*When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more." (John 8:9-11)*

The transition that Jesus makes from the issue of murder to adultery is seamless. It appears that He completely changes topics but He doesn't. He has been dealing with the root issue of both anger and adultery, which is covetousness, desiring something that **doesn't** belong to you. Jesus connects covetousness to adultery because it is this desire towards another that leads to divorce, the breaking of wedlock or oneness.

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<sup>4</sup> John 8:1-11

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 22:22 "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel."

**The Commands:**

- ❖ If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you.
- ❖ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you.

**Group Discussion:**

1. If you have been married what are some of the vows that you made?
2. What are some possible repercussions of breaking wedlock?

**The Lesson:**

The introduction to this lesson covered some of the legal issues involving adultery. But Jesus wants His disciples to see the root causes for it. The story of King David and Bathsheba shed light on these causes and contrast the moral and legal issues of adultery. Following is a summary of their story.

King David watched Bathsheba, a married woman bathe. The Law did not forbid this. Then David initiated physical contact with her. Then they had sexual intercourse and she became pregnant. Adulterous sexual relations were forbidden under the Law. David tried to hide the consequences of his sin, the unborn child. If he couldn't find a way out of the predicament Bathsheba would be shamed, more than likely divorced and possibly stoned to death.

David hatched a plan to have Bathsheba's husband' Uriah, who was a commander in the army and away at war, return to Jerusalem. David wanted Uriah to have sexual relations with Bathsheba while he was at home on leave from the army so that it would appear that the unborn child was theirs. However, Uriah didn't have sexual relations with Bathsheba. David realized that if Uriah divorced Bathsheba, everyone would know that he was committing adultery if he married her.

So David devised a second plan. He sent Uriah back to war and instructed another commander to allow Uriah to be killed in the fighting. This gave the appearance that David didn't really murder him. It also appeared that David had the right to marry Bathsheba since her husband died and she had not been divorced. However, God knew the intentions of David's heart and brought judgment against him.

As He did with the issue of murder, Jesus discloses the pattern of **steps** that lead to divorce, the final act of breaking wedlock. Each of the steps also serves as a warning. Then Jesus issues instructions for overcoming the temptation at each step. Committing adultery is about being unfaithful to one's vows. And it all starts with a look.

In Matthew 5:28, Jesus says that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. He places the responsibility for the sin of adultery squarely on the shoulders of the man. If a man is married or was married and divorced from his wife, then he should not be looking to take another woman as his wife in the first place. Secondly, it is the single man's duty to find out whether a woman is married or was married and divorced before he pursues her. He is free to choose from women who have never been married or those whose spouse's have died.

The temptation to commit the sin of adultery comes through the lust of the eyes. It is the sin of envy or covetousness, desiring something or someone an individual is not entitled to. It is the way that one person **looks** at another. In our society we have a term for that look. We say that, "his or her eyes are green with envy." Jesus gives His disciples the solution for preventing the lustful

look. He commands them to pluck out their right eye and throw it away if it offends them. This Aramaic idiom simply means, “**Stop envying or coveting.**”

Jesus goes on to say, “*If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.*” The second step towards committing adultery involves taking possession of another person. Usually this happens through inappropriate **touching**. This is a lust of the flesh. Jesus commands His disciples to cut off their right hand if it offends them. The idiom means “**stop stealing.**” Most people on the path to adultery think they are having illicit sexual encounters with a person other than their spouse. They have never considered themselves envious people or thieves.

The final step and warning is adulterous sexual **intercourse**. Jesus demands that His disciples not to divorce their spouses for any reason other than infidelity in the relationship. In that case the spouse has already violated the marriage covenant by becoming one with another person.

### **Reading the Scripture:**

**Jesus Teaches on Divorce**  
**Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12**  
*Scripture excerpts from “Follow Me: A Message from God”*

And it came about that when Jesus had finished these words, He went from there to the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan; and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. Crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?” And He answered and said, “Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE<sup>6</sup>, and said, ‘FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’?<sup>7</sup> Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?”<sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” And in the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.” The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

Spiritual adultery with God follows the same path. In the first step a person **looks** at or desires other gods. In the second he **serves** them. The third step he **prays** to them. This act is called

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<sup>6</sup> MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. *Genesis 1:27*

<sup>7</sup> FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH?. *Genesis 2:24*

<sup>8</sup> GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY? *Deuteronomy 24:1-4*

apostasy meaning a falling away from or separating from. In the Scriptures we are told the Israel played the harlot. They went after foreign gods and served them.

God was displeased with Israel and even gave the northern kingdom a writ of divorce.<sup>9</sup> Yet He has remained a faithful husband to them by not taking another people ... waiting patiently for the day when they would return to Him. God has shown Himself to be a faithful husband. In 2 Timothy 2:11-13, Paul writes about the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. *“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.”* The way of love is faithfulness in relationships.

**Group Discussion:**

3. How does Jesus’ teaching on adultery contrast with our society’s views?

**The Point of the Lesson:**

Avoid the lustful look.

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<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 3:8 (The book of Hosea also deals extensively with this subject.)