Lust, Adultery, and Divorce

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[0:00] It's so good to worship with you guys. Sometimes when I worship, on Sunday mornings, I'm just overwhelmed by God's love for me.! And then as I look around, I'm overwhelmed by God's love for you.

You are so loved by God, and that's reason enough for me to well up with love for you.
And it's a privilege for me to be counted among you, to worship with you, and to get to now preach God's word to you. So please turn with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5, verse 27 to 32.
Let me pray before we read for God's help. Heavenly Father, You know all things.
You see all things. And Your word searches our hearts. And as we stand before a bracing, searching passage like this, Lord, we feel exposed, ashamed in our sin.
[1:27] I ask, Father, that the conviction of sin would not lead us to wallow in guilt and shame, but it would lead to godly grief and sorrow that leads to repentance, to transformation, to growth, to holiness and purity.

And I ask, Father, that You would reveal more deeply the power of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, so that we walk away from this place assured and rejoicing in the full forgiveness and freedom that is found in Him alone.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please stand as I read from Matthew 5, 27 to 32, to honor God as we read from His word.
You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery.
But I say to you, that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.
[2:56] For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 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. It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you, that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery.
And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. It's God's holy and authoritative word.
Please be seated. An estimated 50 to 60% of married men and 45 to 55% of married women commit adultery.
That means marital infidelity affects nearly half of all couples in the world or in our country. Nearly 50% of married couples get divorced and over 70% of second marriages, a second try, and then divorce.
Adultery and divorce are both rampant in our sinful world. And I don't think it should surprise any of us that what is often at the heart and at the root of divorce and adultery is lust, which is what Jesus addresses in this passage.
[4:25] As the redeemed bride of Christ, we must fight both the adultery of the body and the adultery of the heart. That's the main point of Jesus' teaching here.

And we're going to first talk about adultery through lust in verses 27 to 30, and then adultery through divorce in verse 31 and 32. In his overarching teaching about the Old Testament law in the preceding passage in verses 17 to 20, Jesus said, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill them.
And for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Then in the following six passages, as I mentioned last week, Jesus gives us a series of six antitheses or contrasts where he uses the same formula.

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You have heard that it was said, and he will cite some Old Testament scripture or how the Jews understood and interpreted that scripture, and he will say, but I say to you, offering a contrast, a better and a fuller exposition and interpretation of that passage.
Jesus is showing us through this series what true Christian obedience and righteousness looks like. This is the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, but your righteousness must exceed that, and this is what Jesus shows us.
[5:41] We looked at the first antithesis last week, and we're looking at the second and third today, and he begins with that same formula in verse 27. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

This time, Jesus is citing the seventh of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20, verse 13, and Deuteronomy 5, 17. Adultery specifically refers to a married person being involved in some kind of sexual relations with someone who is not his or her spouse, or having sexual relations with someone who is another person's husband or wife.
The Jews of Jesus' day correctly understood adultery to be sinful, and they believed that it was forbidden by God's word. However, they defined adultery so narrowly and thereby circumscribed and limited this law, the scope of this law, that it lost the true force and the heart and the spirit of the law.
So in verse 28, Jesus gets to the heart of the seventh commandment and reveals its full scope when he says, but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
The Greek word for lustful intent simply means desire or longing. It's a neutral word that can be used for desire for good things as well as desire for bad things.
[7:11] When it refers to desiring and longing for something that is forbidden, something that belongs to another and is not rightfully yours, it is often translated in scripture as coveting.

And the Jews should have already known, based on the Ten Commandments, that lustful desire is also forbidden, not just adultery, because the Tenth Commandment in the Ten Commandments is you shall not covet, and it says specifically, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife and vice versa, your neighbor's husband also.
It is sinful to sleep with your neighbor's wife or husband, it's also sinful to desire or long for your neighbor's wife or husband. True obedience to God is not only external, but internal.
It entails not only keeping our bodies pure, but keeping our hearts and minds pure, because out of the heart, Jesus says in Matthew 15, 19, out of the heart comes evil thoughts, adultery, sexual immorality.
They originate in the human heart. Our sinful world appeals to this lust in innumerable ways. Sex appeal is a major selling point, remains so to this day in advertising and media, especially in fashion, lifestyle, and entertainment industries.
[8:31] Many influencers on social media are not shy about selling their product with visual appeal to get more clicks. Dating apps pander to instant gratification, and they promise casual encounters.

The global porn industry, which some estimate to be worth up to $287 billion, which is more than Hollywood and NFL combined, inflames people's lusts every day to the tune of hundreds of millions of daily visits to porn sites and billions of visits per month.
Studies say that 78% of men and 44% of women watch porn. This is not a male-only problem.
It doesn't matter that it is pornified cartoons or manga or anime or a video game. It has the same adulterating effect on the human heart and the same deadly consequences in our lives.
It's a pernicious lie, in fact, that porn is harmless. It objectifies women primarily, but also some men. It promotes sexual degradation, exploitation, and trafficking.
[9:54] It distorts real-life intimacy and relationships, creates unrealistic expectations, and makes it increasingly difficult for people to have real intimacy and real relationships.

It erodes trust. It impairs people's capacity for genuine sexual intimacy as well. A study published in the journal Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity found that 70% of wives of sex addicts could be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.
Another study reports that 56% of divorce cases involved one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic materials.
In fact, when pornography is involved in a marriage, couples are twice as likely to divorce. Jesus was right.

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Lust is far from harmless. And don't think that lust always involves the eyes only.
[11:06] Sometimes it takes place entirely in the mind and in the imagination. Last year, a New York Times article claimed that a certain novel which talks about a middle-aged woman committing adultery and experimenting with open marriage is the, quote, talk of every group text composed of women over 40.

I was a little skeptical. So this week, when I was preparing for this sermon, I checked the Cambridge Public Library for this book. I did not check it out. Don't worry. Even if I don't want to, I don't want anything to do with it.
But even if I wanted to check it out, I couldn't check it out because the library has 260 hard copies. 260! This is Cambridge Public Library, not Boston Public Library. Cambridge Public Library, 260 copies all checked out with 349 people on the wait list.
This is our city. There are 286 e-book copies of this book all checked out. 957 people on that wait list.
157 audiobook copies of this book all checked out. 501 people on that wait list. And that's just in Cambridge, a tiny city.
[12:33] Also last year, a popular collection of female sexual fantasies was published by an actress. That kind of literature that capitalizes on people's sinful lust is on the rise.

Once again, Jesus is here exposing the pitfalls of legalism. Legalism is concerned with the letter of the law and not with the spirit or the heart of the law.
Both Jews and Romans actually denounced adultery because they saw it as a violation of man's property rights and because they saw it as a threat to legitimate paternal lineage because it might raise questions about whether someone is a true heir or not.
So they both opposed adultery. However, here's the catch. A married man was considered to be adulterous only if his female partner was a free woman. If he slept with a slave woman, a concubine, or with a prostitute, then there were no problems, no legal ramifications.
He could do it as many times as he wanted. Fourth century B.C. Greek politician Demosthenes famously captures this reality in his saying.
[13:45] He says, we keep prostitutes for pleasure. We keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body. We keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes. The Jewish position was unfortunately not too dissimilar at the time.

Do you see how evil this is? to justify all manner of sexual sin and saying, well, it's not adultery. I haven't really crossed the line. Related to this, there was also a gross double standard at play. While husbands could sleep with any many concubines and prostitutes as they want, the wives could not because of the fear that they'll be impregnated. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6, 12-19, Paul rebukes reputedly Christian men for sleeping with prostitutes.
So-called Christians were justifying sleeping with prostitutes saying, food is meant for the stomach and stomach for food. Likewise, what they were implying was the body is meant for sex and sex for the body and that's what I'm doing.
[14:55] I'm using what the body was made for. That's what God created the body for. There's nothing wrong with that. That's the kind of promiscuous culture into which Jesus is speaking into.

And in John 8, do you remember the story in verses 1-11? The scribes and the Pharisees, they catch somehow a woman in the act of adultery. This woman is caught in the act of adultery and they bring her in and then they say this to trap Jesus.
They say, now in the law of Moses, Moses commanded us to stone such woman. What do you say? If Jesus says, stone her, then they can get him in trouble with the Romans who did not give the Jews the right to capital punishment.
But if he said, no, don't stone her, then they could paint him as someone who abolishes and nullifies the law of God as a law breaker. So they're just trying to trap him. But when you read that story, have you ever wondered, where is the man?
Because it takes two people to commit adultery. And she was caught in the act. The man must have been right there. You only bring the woman to charge before Jesus.
[16:09] Rampant promiscuity, adultery, a double standard at work. That's the problem with legalism.

You can be a legalistic Christian that obeys God's law in all of its outward forms, yet without ever having love for God in your heart. Legalism is concerned with legality out of self-preservation, out of

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self-interest.
In contrast, true Christian obedience is concerned with pleasing God. What is God's will? What tends to God's glory? Legalism is concerned with the limits and the lines of obedience, of God's commands.
True obedience is concerned with the heart and the spirit of God's commands. Once again, when it comes to sexual immorality, too many Christians ask, where are the lines?
Where are the limits of God's commands? So that I can edge as close as I can to that line without crossing it. how physically intimate can I get with my boyfriend or girlfriend without crossing the line?
[17:30] Is kissing okay? Is petting okay? Can I cuddle and sleep next to them as long as we're not having intercourse? Can I cohabit with them as long as we have separate rooms? Why would you invite temptation into your life?

Why would you inflame the lusts that are already strong enough in your life? How many times have people said this kind of things, these kinds of things to themselves?
Well, I've been exchanging suggestive texts with my co-worker, but we haven't actually done anything. I haven't committed adultery.
I've been exchanging long glances and flirting with this woman at the gym, but nothing ever really happened. Adultery of the heart happened, Jesus says.
Have you ever scrolled through suggestive photos and videos on Instagram and TikTok skirting on the edges of propriety without going into full-blown porn and then justifying yourself saying, well, it's not porn.
[18:50] The idolatry, the adultery of the heart has already taken place in your heart when you look at others with lustful longing. love. If coveting is sin, if lustful desire is sin in and of itself, I'm about to say something controversial here, but I wouldn't say it if I weren't fully convinced that this is exactly what God's Word teaches.

If lustful desire is sinful in and of itself, then that means homosexual desire and all kinds of other deviant sexual desires are also sinful.
I singled this out because I have noticed a misguided tendency among Christian leaders and Christian authors to separate homosexual acts from homosexual desires and to justify the desires as long as they are not acted on.
That's a grave mistake. Sure, is there a difference between temptation and sin? Of course, there's a difference between temptation and sin.
We can be tempted from the outside in. It's not your fault that you're driving by and there's a billboard with a naked woman on it. In that case, that outside in temptation, Martin Luther's proverb applies, you cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair.
[20:31] When you're tempted from the outside in, don't linger on that temptation. Don't let that temptation take residence in your heart. Flee.

But that's not the only kind of temptation. There is another kind of temptation. temptation that is from the inside out. James 1, 14-16 says, but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.
Then, desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin and sin, when it's fully grown, brings forth death. When we are sexually tempted from the inside out, the old theologians used to call that concupiscence, it betrays our sin nature.
It reveals that our desires themselves are not aligned with God's will. These desires incubate and ultimately give birth to sin which eventually when fully grown leads to death.
If that's the case, should we not resist these desires? Should we not fight these desires instead of coming to terms with it? Why do people, why do some Christians call themselves gay Christians or same-sex attracted Christians, SSA Christians?
[21:55] The fact that so many Christians in the world consider that to be okay shows just how much homosexuality has become normalized and how worldly the Christians have become.

I've never met Christians who identify themselves as adultery-attracted Christians or fornication-attracted Christians or BDSM-attracted Christians or zoophilic Christians or pedophilic Christians who would identify with such things.

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Why would we identify ourselves with something that is something that is disordered and displeasing to God? Because humanity is fallen and depraved, we have all kinds of ungodly desires that rise from within our hearts and these desires can feel very natural but that does not mean that they are right.
when we're tempted by those desires we need to struggle against them fight against them not accept them and make peace with them and declare proudly that that's a part of who we are. Making sexual orientation or preference a part of your identity is Sigmund Freud's idea. It's not a biblical idea.
[23:31] Lustful desires not only lustful acts are sin. D. Marlon Jones is helpful here. He says in his book studies in the Sermon on the Mount but let me say a word about the subtlety of sin. Sin is this terrible thing which so deludes and fools us as to make us feel quite happy and contented so long as we have not committed the act.

Yes, I say I was tempted but thank God I did not fall. That is all right up to a point so long as I am not too content with that. If I am merely satisfied with the fact that I did not do the thing I am all wrong.
I ought to go on and ask but why did I want to do it? legalists are always trying to circumscribe and limit God's word so that they can claim I have kept it I did not cross the line I did not do the thing but that betrays the minimal obedience mindset that I have been talking about rather than the maximal obedience mindset.
It betrays the fact that they do not actually see God is good and benevolent and that he has their good interest in mind rather they see God is stingy and begrudging always trying to stifle them and deprive them of the good things that the world offers.
I have used this illustration before but if we see God's word and his commands as a straight jacket intended to stifle us and restrict us then we are going to try to wiggle out of it as much as we can and to push the boundaries as much as we can and sneak out of it as often as we can because we don't see God's word as good.
[25:14] But if you see God's word and God's command as a life jacket I'm clasping all the straps keeping it tight keeping it right at the center fitting snugly into God's plan and God's will because I know it's for my good because I know it's for my salvation because I know it's to preserve me.

So instead of flirting with sin and skirting the edges of God's will I want to encourage you and exhort you to seek to live at the center of God's will.
for those of us who do want to strive for that maximal purity and obedience Jesus gets very practical in verse 29 and 30.
If your right eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away for it is better that you lose one of your members and that your whole body be thrown into hell 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 and that your whole body go into hell.
The word causes you to sin is a translation of a word that literally means to cause someone to stumble which is a recurring word in the gospel of Matthew.
[26:37] In this context it means to make someone stumble into sin in such a way that they fall into perdition into hell fall away from the saving purposes of God.

Jesus says it's better for you to lose one of your members of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. The word for hell is not the word for Hades or that shadowy realm of death that is sometimes mistranslated as hell in the New Testament.
This is the word Gehenna which is referring to the valley of Hinnom which comes from the valley of Hinnom the word from Gehenna because that was the area where sacrifices human sacrifices to Molech the idol of the Old Testament.
And because it was such a desecrated area tradition says that people in Jerusalem went outside to the valley of Hinnom and burned all their garbage there.
So there was always stink and fire and smoke rising up from the place which made it an apt picture of the eternal destruction and the eternal fires of hell that await the devil and his minions and those humans who follow him.
[27:50] So this is meant to be a shocking statement. Jesus is talking about lust right? So many of you in accountability groups have confessed the sin of lust.

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Jesus is saying if you don't fight this tooth and nail your whole body is going to be thrown into hell. Are you catching the drama of what Jesus is saying?
Too many Christians think that the fight against sin is a friendly risk-free wrestling match between friends or something like that. They think that there are no real consequences.
Sure, sin might hurt me and affect my life here and there but I'm saved and I'm eternally secure. sin, however, is under no such delusion.
Sin knows that it's in a death match with you. It's trying to choke you to death when sin gets a stranglehold on the so-called Christian and then the Christian starts to wonder, oh, ouch, ouch, that actually really hurts.
[29:05] That's a little overaggressive, don't you think? I mean, it's a friendly wrestling match and then eventually, eventually, your very life breath is ebbing out of you. 17th century English pastor John Owen famously said, be killing sin or sin will be killing you.

If you make peace with sin, you're no longer repenting of sin, you're no longer resisting sin. The final result is not less sanctification, it's eternal damnation.
Why? Not because true Christians can lose their salvation, but because all true Christians persevere in faith and obedience until the end. That's how we know they are true Christians.
You know them by their fruit because the fight for holiness is the fight for faith because if you really believe God's promises and God's word that it is true and good and beautiful, then it's going to show in your life.
Pastor John Piper wrote about this in his book, Future Grace. He says, A few years ago, I spoke to a high school student body on how to fight lust. One of my points was called, Ponder the eternal danger of lust.
[30:29] I quoted the words of Jesus that it's better to go to heaven with one eye than to hell with two and said to the students that their eternal destiny was at stake in what they did with their eyes and with the thoughts of their imagination. After my message, one of the students asked, Are you saying then that a person can lose his salvation?

This is exactly the same response I got a few years ago when I confronted a man about the adultery he was living in. I pled with him to return to his wife. Then I said, You know, Jesus says that if you don't fight this sin with the kind of seriousness that is willing to gouge out your own eye, you will go to hell.
As a professing Christian, he looked at me in utter disbelief as though he had never heard anything like this in his life and said, You mean you think a person can lose his salvation? So I have learned again and again from first-hand experience that there are many professing Christians who have a view of salvation that disconnects it from real life and that nullifies the threats of the Bible and puts the sinning person who claims to be a Christian beyond the reach of biblical warnings.
I believe this view of the Christian life is comforting thousands who are on the broad way that leads to destruction. The main concern of this book is to show that the battle against sin is a battle against unbelief or the fight for purity is a fight for faith in future grace.
the great error that I am trying to explode is the error that says faith in God is one thing and the fight for holiness is another thing. The battle for obedience is optional because only faith is necessary for final salvation.
[32:01] Jesus is being totally serious in verse 29 and 30. He's not being literal but he nevertheless is totally serious.

It's better to enter heaven with one eye than hell with two. It's better to enter heaven a cripple than hell with two whole legs. How do we know Jesus is not being literal here because some people in church history have actually interpreted this literally and have carried out these commands?
Yeah, do you think you're serious about following Jesus? Jesus? We know it's not literal because in verse 28 Jesus told us that he's concerned about what's going on in our hearts, not just what we do with our bodies, with lustful desires and not merely with lustful acts.
We can't physically remove lust from our hearts, can we? I wish we could. I wish they had surgeons for that. I'd be the first to line up. Literally gouging out our eyes will not stop us from lusting.
I've used the example of Ray Charles before, the famous soul musician from the 20th century. He was blind, but he was famous, famously a womanizer. He had no eyes to gouge out, but he was full of lust.
[33:26] Married and divorced twice, many affairs, fathered a total of 12 children by 10 women, 10 different women. All that to say, Jesus is not telling us to mutilate our flesh literally.

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He's being figurative, but his command is no less real and bracing. He's telling us to remove decisively the things that cause us to fall, the sources of temptations in our lives.
Don't read things or scroll through things or watch things that you know will inflame your lusts. Well, but everybody's watching that and talking about that.
Everyone who is cultured and educated reads and watches that. Well, then be content to be considered ignorant and uncultured and uneducated.
Be content to be excluded and left out of those conversations. That's the hot topic and trending for everybody else. Be content to be not in the know.
[34:28] It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your smartphone causes you to sin, get a dumb phone. If you're working from home is ripe for temptations, go to a co-working space or to a public library.

If your boyfriend or girlfriend is causing you to sin, break up with that person. Seek counsel from a pastor. If there's a flirty co-worker that is tempting you, ask me move to a different department or quit the job and move to a new job.
Well, that's kind of drastic. No, that's so inconvenient. Of course it's inconvenient. Losing your eye and your hand is also inconvenient. That's exactly Jesus' point.
Why does he specifically say right hand? Because the right hand is, for most people, the dominant hand. It's the more useful, more needful hand. And right eye, I think, is just paralleling that.
He says, even if it's your right hand, the thing that you need the most to get around and to do the things you need to do, even if it's one of those most important things in your life, dear things in your life, precious things in your life, get rid of it if it's leading you to sin.
[35:49] Because isn't our eternal well-being more important than our temporal well-being? What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul? In 2019, a Nebraskan farmer named Kurt Kaser was working on his farm when he accidentally stepped into a running machine.

I think it was a cornhopper. I don't know exactly how that works, but it was sucking him in slowly, and the machine was running, and he was stuck, and he had no family around. He knew it would be a while before anybody came to the farm, and he knew that not before long he would die.
So he made a quick decision. He took the pocket knife out, and he amputated his own leg and freed himself from the machine. Do you think that's crazy?
That is the only sensible thing to do in that situation. Why? Because he wanted to live. Do you want to live? Do you want to live forever?
Do you want to have eternal life? Do you want to be in the kingdom of heaven and have eternal fellowship with God? Gouge out that eye. Cut off that hand.
[37:06] 1 Corinthians 6, 9-10 says, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkard, nor redeemed, revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

If you have come to terms with your sexual immorality, if you have reached a ceasefire, and you're not fighting sin anywhere in your life, you're not killing sin, you're no longer repenting of your sin, if you have troves of porn downloaded on your hard drive, if you know that you are in sexual sin, but you're not willing to change anything about it, you're staying in it, then you will not inherit the kingdom of God.
Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil, desire, covetousness, which is idolatry, Colossians 3, 5. Cut it off. Before I move on to the next point, I want to share a potential objection that some people might raise.
D. Martin Lloyd-Jones is insightful on this point again. He says, but someone may ask at this point, are you not teaching a kind of morbid scrupulosity? Is not life going to be rather wretched and miserable?
Well, there are people who become morbid, but if you want to know the difference between them and what I am teaching, think of it in this way. Morbid scrupulosity is always concerned about itself, its state and condition, and its own achievements.
[38:42] True holiness, on the other end, is always concerned about pleasing God, glorifying Him, and ministering to the glory of Jesus Christ. If you and I keep that ever in the foreground of our minds, we need not be very worried about becoming morbid.

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All that will be at once avoided if we do it for His sake instead of spending the whole of our time feeling our spiritual pulse and taking our spiritual temperature. You guys understand?
It's very wise counsel from the doctor. If you have an overactive conscience, and you suffer from scrupulosity, get your mind off of yourself and onto Christ and onto God.
That's the key. Now to my second point, adultery through divorce. This is a shorter point. The topic of divorce and remarriage is more fully addressed later on in Matthew 19, so I'll reserve detailed treatment until that point.
However, I do want to note the connections between verse 31 and 32 and verses 27 to 30. Technically, they are separate passages. They're distinct and tip that cease. However, they're related.
[39:45] Follow along with me in verse 31 and 32. It was also said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery.

And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Jesus is here alluding to Deuteronomy 24, 1 to 4, which talks about writing a certificate of divorce for the woman in the event that the husband is divorcing her.
But Jesus presents a contrast, an antithesis. He says, but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery.
To simplify it, read that verse without the exception clause. Cover up the exception clause with your finger and try reading it. Everyone who divorces his wife makes her commit adultery.
And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. How is that so? Usually we only call it adultery if someone who is still married is involved. When a divorced person marries another partner, we call it remarriage.
[40:55] But Jesus says that this is tantamount to adultery. Why? The assumption is that the first marriage is still binding because it's a covenant that God has brought together.

Jesus' teaching is consistent elsewhere. For example, in Luke 16, 18, everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.
Almost identical formulation in Mark 10, 11. Jesus is essentially forbidding divorce. Why? Once again, it gets to the heart of God's law.
Rather than merely observing the letter of God's law, in those days, men often divorced their wives for frivolous reasons. One prominent Jewish school of thought associated with Rabbi Hillel taught that a man may justly divorce his wife for something as trivial as spoiling a meal.
I'm divorcing you today because you burnt my toast. Legitimate. That's what they said. Josephus, first century Jewish historian, writes in a cavalier manner about his divorce.
[42:04] He says, at this time of my life, I sent away my wife being displeased with her behavior and then I took a wife, a woman from Crete. What often underlies such casual divorces and remarriages?

Lust. Men in those days and both men and women nowadays game the system by marrying, divorcing, remarrying, divorcing, remarrying, divorcing, remarrying as often as their fantasies and fascinations change, thereby fulfilling the lust of their hearts without ever getting into legal trouble. But Jesus here exposes the evil of that. Why then did Moses allow people to divorce? Jesus answers that exact question in Matthew 19.8.
He says, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. Divorce was intended to be a temporary provision for a broken and fallen world.
It was a concession to the hardness of the human heart, intended to mitigate human failure and not to establish the divine ideal or standard. If you have a neighborhood full of drug addicts and because you don't want them to die from contaminated syringes, you put some clean syringes over there for people, can those people say, like, oh, I'm following the law because I use clean syringes every single time?
[43:41] No, you're doing illegal drugs. It's intended to mitigate human failure. That's what divorce is. Not the actual standard that you're supposed to keep.

What's the actual standard? Jesus says, he quotes Genesis 2, 24 in Matthew 19, 5 to 6. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one

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flesh.
So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. God is the one who joins a man and woman together in a covenant of marriage and is not for man to break it apart.
That still leaves the exception clause to make sense of. But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual morality makes her commit adultery.
The exception clause, I think, according to my best interpretation at this point, is there to exempt the husband from the guilt of making his wife commit adultery. In this culture, in this part of the ancient world, divorced women would usually have no recourse for survival.
[44:49] They would be forced to remarry so that they could be provided for. And so when a husband unjustly divorces her, he would be guilty of making her commit adultery because he forced her into that.

But if the husband divorced his wife due to her own infidelity, then he does not bear that guilt of making her commit adultery because she was already one.
So sexual immorality or infidelity does become a sort of grounds for divorce, though nowhere in the Bible does Jesus ever command divorce in such situations, and there can still be forgiveness and reconciliation even after sins as deeply damaging as adultery.
Let me add one slight qualification here because I have met some Christian therapists in the past who have counseled Christians to divorce their Christian spouses because of their sins of lust and pornography.
And they would cite this passage and say, well, adultery is lust and looking at pornography, lust of the heart is adultery of the heart, and here it says adultery is grounds for divorce, therefore you should divorce your wife, divorce your husband.
[46:05] And I've seen therapists use this logic and reasoning before, but that's a specious claim. In that case, should we also institute the death penalty for sinful anger?

Because in the preceding passage, Jesus said, if you're angry with your brother, then you have committed murder in your heart. Does that make any sense? No, it doesn't. Is there a single man in the world who can claim that he has never, not once, looked at a woman lustfully?
According to that interpretation, every Christian woman in the world should divorce their husbands because they're all adulterous. This is misguided application of the passage.
Jesus is not legislating civil laws that should be enforced by the courts or the governing authorities. He is teaching a personal ethic. Jesus is not lowering the bar for divorce.
He's just raising the bar for purity and obedience. Are you guys with me? What are we as Christians to do with such a high bar?
[47:18] Only the most naively optimistic person, Christian, can read a passage like this and think, okay, pretty reasonable, doable, yeah, sure, let me create a checklist.

That's the point. When you understand God's holiness and God's word in its right place, then you realize you can never be holy enough.
You can never be pure enough. You can never be righteous enough. This is not meant to put a hurdle in front of you and say, okay, this is doable, now do it, jump over.
No, it's meant to be so high that you despair of any chance of you clearing that hurdle on your own and instead you turn to Jesus and cling to him for salvation.
salvation. Maybe right now, and I know this is the case because of the statistics and because of many of you that I've talked to, I know there's dozens of you, if not scores of you, who have sinned in these ways, who struggle with these sins and you mourn it and you grieve it and you want to change and you're having a hard time change.
[48:48] And maybe you feel like that person in Lauren's prophecy, you feel like you're in this bathtub and you feel black and stained and you keep trying to wash yourself to the point of scraping your skin off and you still cannot get the stain off.

That is the reality for all sinners in the world apart from Christ. You will never get it off. We're like a prostitute, a whore who is trying to come to a wedding.
The hair is disheveled, the face, the makeup's all smeared and the clothings are all soiled and tatter from her harlotry.
How's she gonna get married? Who's gonna take her? That's the church, the bride of Christ. And then we read in Ephesians 5 that Jesus loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might

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sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.
in the beautiful picture of the wedding supper of the Lamb and the bride that's gonna be married to Jesus, the bridegroom.
[50:28] What does it say here about the saints? How does it describe them in Revelation 7, 14? These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Did you guys catch that Psalm 51 that Lauren shared from? Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. That's the Psalm that David wrote after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and Nathan the prophet came and confronted him and saying, you are the man and he's broken and heartbroken and that's what he writes because he knows that his only hope of cleansing is not in his righteousness but the blood of Jesus Christ and if you forsake your own righteousness and you go to Jesus and say, with your blood I can be made clean and your blood I can be washed as white as snow then Jesus puts that white beautiful wedding gown on you and you get to hold your head up high and go to the wedding supper of the Lamb to be the bride of Christ forever.
That's the good news and it's only people who believe and get that good news who want to be pure in every way who pursue utmost purity who want to remove every blemish every hint of unfaithfulness every hint of infidelity because you love Jesus your bridegroom because you want to please your bridegroom because you would do anything for the one who gave everything for you.
Let's pray that it would be all of us.

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