

Jesus On (5):  
 Adultery, Divorce and Oaths (5:27-37)

### Introduction

Welcome to Meck!

Before we get started, I've got a few little announcements and some personal news to share that those of you who follow me on Twitter or Instagram already know about.

But for those of you who don't, here's a picture of my new little granddaughter, Ruth Belle White.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*pic of me and Ruth

\*\*\*\*\*

Daughter of my son Jonathan, whom many of you know, and his lovely wife Emily.

Miss Rudy Belle came in at 19.5" long and weighed a petite 7 pounds, 3 ounces. And she already has her Papa's heart.

Particularly after a run of five straight snout-nosed grandsons. I am ready for a girl!

So that brings my grandbaby total to eight.

And Zach and Susannah have another on the way, due in February, so that will make it nine.

So I am in direct competition with everybody who has more.

The other thing I want to draw your attention to is that we have coming up the Church & Culture Conference. It is here at Meck and it is this Thursday.

So if you've been planning on registering, wanting to attend, thinking about it... now is the time.

We have people and teams coming from as far away as England which means that you have no excuse.

Not only is it right here, put on by your church, but it's also at a ridiculously reduced rate that essentially just covers the expenses of it and allows us to take it in a missional way to other cities.

It's only \$25 to attend for the day and I hope that you will.

I know the content we'll be covering and I know the sight and sound journey we'll be going on, and I so want you there.

I really do. I hope that you'll make every effort to get whatever you need to be cared for in terms of getting off of work or finding childcare. I know it will be a bit of a hassle for you to do that, but I hope you will.

I think the content will be mind-blowing and change your vision on so many different things.

The Church & Culture Conference is an annual event and we update the content every year.

I want you to hear from a couple of Meckers about why they have enjoyed it in the past and why they're planning on being here again this year.

One is a stay-at-home mom and the other is a guy who is a marketplace leader. Just listen to them and see if what they had to say might be an encouragement for you as well.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*video of Susan and Joe talking about the Conference  
<https://vimeo.com/290059980>

\*\*\*\*\*

You can go onto ChurchAndCulture.org to register and also there's a link from the Mecklenburg.org website.

All you have to do is put in the code MECKER2018 at checkout to get the discount.

It will be a wonderful fun day, and the full Arts Team will be joining me as well. And during the lunch break we'll have food trucks out there.

It's just going to be a fun day with very important content so I hope that you'll make every effort to get registered for that.

Again it's this Thursday from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. here at the North Charlotte Campus so I hope to see you there.

Well, as we continue our series through the Sermon on the Mount which is the most famous single message Jesus ever gave (and in many ways is a crystallization of His central teaching) we come to some sensitive issues.

Personal issues. Family issues. Marriage issues. Sexuality issues.

And before I read what He had to say about them, let me set the stage.

Because if I can set the stage for you about what was going on in the culture of that day and time, it will add so much to your understanding of what Jesus said and how He said it and what a bombshell it would have been to everyone listening.

So let me see if I can take you back a little bit.

The religious establishment of Jesus' day was firmly entrenched. They were the epicenter of culture. They were dictating everything. And they were absolutely bound up in legalism.

Dos and don'ts, rituals and practices, laws and codes. But absolutely nothing about the heart. The inner world. Their thought life. Who they were when no one was looking.

In fact, they used their legalism to cover up a lot of bad behavior and making it seem as though it wasn't bad behavior.

They would find ways around their laws and rules they put in place to allow them to pursue whatever it is they really wanted.

So when it came to sexual misconduct, all that mattered to them was that if you were married, you didn't commit adultery.

That was it. Follow that one air-tight rule as legalistically as possible and you're fine.

Which means pre-marital sex, post-marital sex, lust - all of that went unchecked, because all that mattered was keeping the letter of the law on adultery.

And that carried over into how they treated divorce.

Since adultery was the one sin you had to avoid, they made it really easy to avoid it by making it easy to divorce without penalty.

In other words, easy to get out of the marriage so that you could have sex with who you wanted to have sex with and avoid the adultery label.

And all of this at the expense of women, who were treated in misogynistic ways and as second-class citizens.

So they made it so that a man could divorce his wife with just a written notice. Just an "I don't want to be married anymore" kind of note.

And that was that. And it could be over anything.

You could divorce a woman in Jesus' day for a badly cooked meal.

You could divorce a woman in Jesus' day simply because you found someone else more attractive.

And all of this was because they built up all of these ways to get out of formal oaths - formal contracts - so that they were not binding.

So they were able to game the system.

The woman had no recourse, no defense.

They were tossed aside on the social dungheap, left to fend for themselves as best they could.

As a divorced woman, few if any man would ever want to marry them.

So they would end up as beggars or forced into prostitution.

Now, with that setting in mind, Jesus brings up all of these issues - adultery, divorce, lust oath-breaking - and he does it in a way that leaves the people saying:

"We've never heard anybody teach this way before. We've never heard anybody say things like this before. It's going against everything our religious leaders have been telling us."

Let's walk through it.

#### I. Lust

Here's how He began this section:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28, NIV)

Okay, let's stop there. Their mouths were already open.

Jesus begins by saying, "You're right about adultery. It's bad. But you can't stop there. Let's talk about the lust that is behind it, the lust that drives someone into adultery.

"I mean, you're patting yourself on the back for not breaking that one particular sexual rule, but you don't realize that ANY sexual act or thought that violates the sanctity of sex within marriage is adulterous."

In Jesus' day, as in ours, just about everybody agreed that adultery in the strict sense of the word - which was cheating on your spouse sexually - was a bad thing.

But that's where they stopped - with adultery in the strict sense of the term.

Anything else was fair game!

For example, they told themselves that sex before marriage was okay. After all, it's not like you were cheating on your spouse, right? You don't have a spouse!

Then they said, "And hey, if you aren't married, but the other person is, you're still okay because YOU aren't married!

"And if you are divorced or widowed, you can pretty much do what you want, because it's not like you're gonna lose your virginity or something, much less cheat on anybody.

"And even if you ARE married, you can engage in sexual thoughts, sexual fantasies, even sexual activities, as long as there isn't actual intercourse.

"Because that's all that matters, right?"

Jesus jumped into all of that and said, "Stop it! This is insane! You're making a mockery out of more than I can count.

"You've heard adultery is wrong and what you heard is true.

"But you've missed the heart of God in all of this. What is destructive to your soul and everything God made you to be and enjoy sexually,

"... is undermined not simply by adultery in the technical sense, but adultery in its fullest sense!"

"Listen," Jesus says, "anything outside of the marriage covenant and commitment between a man and a woman not only violates the sanctity of marriage as the place for sexual expression and fulfillment but it will violate you! And violate your relationship with God.

"So don't go into all of your pre-marital, post-marital, she's married but I'm not, we didn't go all the way, stuff.

"I'm telling you to not even go as far as giving into lustful thoughts! Is that clear enough?"

You might be thinking, "That's impossible."

Is it?

Jesus isn't talking about a passing glance, or even appreciating the fact that someone is attractive.

He's not even talking about sexual attraction, because we're sexual beings and we're going to find people sexually attractive.

He's talking about the look of lust. The look that involves the desire, the fantasy, of having sex with someone.

The look that feeds the inner sensual appetite that, left to itself, would give in to desire alone and leave the boundaries for which it was created.

He's talking about that long, lingering look that takes it all in and gives yourself over to whatever sexual thoughts you're having.

I don't know about you, but I think that kind of lust is a choice.

And it's a critical one. Because that's where sexual sin begins. And that beginning is so strong, so real, so decisive, that it's as if you have already gone to bed with them.

Now don't get all trippy on me and say, "Well if the thought and the act are the same I might as well go forward with the act and have some fun."

No.

What Jesus is saying is that the thought is the first part of the act. It's not innocent; it's not to be made light of.

Treat that first look as if it was the act itself - and resist it with that kind of energy and resolve.

Because sexual sin is more than just the final act of intercourse!

The act itself is the symptom, the culmination, of an infection that was allowed to spread into your heart and soul.

Things like adultery, in all its forms, don't just happen - they begin.

We're in bed with someone mentally and emotionally long before we are in bed with them physically.

Well, having said that, Jesus then gives them some practical advice about how to live that way.

Let's keep reading:

*"If your right eye causes you to sin, 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 in to hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, 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."*

(Matthew 5:29-30, NIV)

Now obviously Jesus isn't talking about actually gouging out our eyes or cutting off our hands.

That wouldn't even help! Because sexual sin is a heart issue, not a hand or an eye issue.

What Jesus is saying is that whatever causes us to engage in sex in ways that do not honor ourselves, others or God should be dealt with radically.

Whatever is feeding our thought-life, feeding our imagination, causing us to engage in that first step of lust in our hearts, should be dealt with severely. Swiftly. Dramatically.

It's not worth it. The stakes are too high. But make no mistake - we're the ones who have to deal with it.

So let's get real specific and talk about what Jesus pinpointed for us to focus on - our eyes and our hands; beginning with our eyes.

What are you looking at that is causing you to engage in sexual sin within your heart, setting you up to act it out in your life?

You know. Let's not play games.

Every month, porn sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter combined.

More than one out of every three internet downloads are porn related, and at least 1/3 of all data - ALL data - transferred across the internet is porn-related.

Globally, porn is estimated to be a \$97 billion industry.

In 2016 alone, more than 4,599,000,000 hours were consumed on the world's largest porn site. That's just one site. Over 4.5 billion hours.

And that particular site outranks the likes of eBay, MSN and Netflix.

Right now, almost 7 out of every ten young people - ages 13-24 - actively seek out pornography weekly if not more.<sup>1</sup>

Do you know what that's doing to you?

Don't tell me nothing. Because I'll tell you pastorally that you are full of it.

That's not intellectually honest, not sexually honest and not spiritually honest.

You know what it's doing to you. Studies certainly know what it's doing to you.

It's leading you to sexualize every person, every relationship, every situation.

And it's undermining whatever relationship you are currently in.

Please do not try to tell me that it is helping your married sex-life. Please, don't bring that to me. That is beyond bogus and if you're using that line with your spouse than shame on you.

It does not help your marriage sexually. In fact, it's been proven that it undermines it.

In fact, people who admit to having extramarital affairs were over 300% more likely to admit consuming porn than those who have never had an affair.

We know porn causes affairs. It's not up for debate. And let me add my own two-cents to this.

Something that I've observed over 30-plus years of working with marriages. Most divorces have adultery as part of it.

Most divorces I've been privy to - and I've been privy to a lot as an occupational hazard - most divorces happen because an affair is revealed, whether in the present or in the past.

Or an emotional affair surfaces. Or an attraction develops. Or there's some kind of sexual misconduct.

Almost every divorce I have been a witness to has some type of marital unfaithfulness as a component.

Jesus says, "Gouge it out at the start."

"Deal with any and all lust immediately and decisively.

"Don't let your eyes do that to you.

"Do whatever it takes to cut it off."

So how do you do that?

I'll tell you right now, but you're not going to like it.

When I tell you what you need to do, it's going to feel like gouging an eye and you're not going to want to do it.

Become accountability partners with someone else through accountability software, so that any sketchy site you visit gets reported to them.

That'll clean things up fast.

My sons and I are accountability partners like that. We get reports every week.

We use Covenant Eyes on some devices as well as XXXChurch on others. There's lot of good ones out there and they're free. Pick one, then pick a partner and get with it.

You say, "I don't need to do that. That's a sign of weakness. I'm strong enough for that."

Okay well I want to take you out for coffee because you're a lot more spiritual than I am and I want to learn from you.

You must walk much closer to Jesus than I do, are much more spiritually mature, and are someone who's on top of everything. I would love to learn from you.

You think it's a sign of weakness?

Really? I think it's a sign of strength.

And then there are your hands.

In other words, things that you do - how you live and order your life.

Let's get specific here, too.

Are you a flirt? If I were to get people from other settings and ask them would they say you are a flirt?

Do you dress to be attractive or to attract?

Do you watch out HOW and WHEN you are alone with someone of the opposite sex?

How do you handle yourself when you travel on a business trip with someone?

What about long lunches, after work drinks or staying late to work together on a project?

Are you talking negatively about your marriage with someone of the opposite sex outside of a professional setting, such as a pastor or counselor?

Anything there need some rethinking?

The point is, again, that you can't take on lust and win. That's what Jesus was trying to get across. You have to take concrete, specific, sometimes even drastic measures.

Ruthlessly evaluate your life and make whatever changes are necessary to protect yourself.

## II. Divorce

Which brings us to what Jesus said next:

*"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 marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery."* (Matthew 5:31-32, NIV)

Another bombshell. Jesus took on the easy divorce culture of his day.

He said, "You are so concerned about the letter of the law about adultery. Not only are you violating that with your unchecked lust, but you are violating that with the way you are treating marriage."

"When you divorce your wife for any and every little thing, and throw her into trying to find another marriage, you are causing her to commit adultery.

"And when you remarry, you're committing adultery, because you never should have divorced!

"You may have some legal certificate in your hand, but it's not in God's hand. He didn't sign it."

Now let's unpack that a bit, because there's a lot of confusion about what the Bible really has to say about divorce.

Let me give you the specific teaching of Jesus on divorce.

First, divorce is usually wrong.

Two key words there: wrong and usually.

Let's deal with the wrong part first.

Jesus says, "I know you have heard that it was okay to divorce each other, but I'm telling you that when you do, you are going against God's law."

And if there is remarriage following a wrongful divorce, you're committing adultery, because in God's eyes, it is a violation of the marriage covenant you entered in to.

God instituted marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman.

From the very beginning, God intended men and women who entered into marriage to make it a life-long commitment. To truly become "one."

Glued together, inseparable. The marriage covenant, or agreement, is for life. So divorce is usually wrong.

But let's look at the word "usually."

Because Jesus says something else.

He also says that divorce can occasionally be right and, upon those occasions, remarriage would not be adultery.

If the divorce isn't wrong, then a remarriage isn't wrong.

So when is a divorce called for or allowed?

The Bible gives us two situations - one that isn't detailed here, but is in other parts of the Bible - and it's physical abandonment. This is when someone leaves you and refuses to stay married to you.

It follows from this that if their behavior is of such a nature that it forces separation - such as illegal behavior, like drug use; or when there is physical abuse - meaning you have to separate yourself for the purpose of your safety or the safety of your children -

... then they are forcing you to leave, to separate, so that is a form of physical abandonment as well.

The other situation is the one mentioned here by Jesus, which is the case of marital unfaithfulness.

Now the words "marital unfaithfulness" seems pretty broad - I mean, you can drive a truck through that, right?

You can pin almost anything on marital unfaithfulness.

"He was emotionally unfaithful to me."

"He was financially unfaithful - he didn't provide the way I needed or I wanted."

"He got fat so he was physically unfaithful to me in terms of my attraction to him."

But hold on - because it's not as general a phrase as you might think.

The actual Greek word Jesus used that we translate being "unfaithful" was not unfaithful in a general sense, but in a very specific sense.

It was the Greek word "porneia," which refers to flagrant and habitual sexual immorality without any desire to repent and be faithful.

Sexual intimacy within marriage is so sacred, so profound, to be so protected, is of such spiritual significance, that it's violation is enough in God's eyes to end the marriage.

No other human activity has the same power as sexual intimacy. It is the supreme expression of a relationship. It is ultimate emotional unity.

So when the marriage is defiled by that oneness being violated through sexual activity with someone outside of the marriage,

... then it so destroys the very fabric of the relationship, that Jesus says divorce is allowed.

That's how serious and wonderful and amazing and powerful and special and sacred sex is, and how tied it is to intimacy and trust.

If it's violated, the marriage is violated - it's torn apart.

So divorce is usually wrong, unless there is habitual sexual immorality, your spouse leaves you or there is the kind of behavior on the part of a spouse that would force you to flee them.

God never meant a marriage relationship to take those kinds of hits.

God never meant for someone's heart to sustain those kinds of blows, that level of treachery, that degree of sin and degradation.

God does not require divorce in those situations, but He allows it.

### III. Oaths

Which brings us to the final thing Jesus has to say:

*"...you have heard that it was said... 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, do not swear at all... Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'...."* (Matthew 5:33-37, NIV)

There's the final strike of the hammer.

Jesus wants all legalism, all game-playing, put aside.

When it comes to the most important human relationship you will ever steward - which is your marriage - it's not about a legal contract.

It's not about technical oaths or pre-nuptial agreements.

This is about who you are as a person before the living God and the person you are marrying.

This isn't about an oath.

This is about every fiber of your being, every ounce of your character, every inch of your determination and resolve, saying "yes" to that relationship.

This isn't about courts of law, contracts or agreements.

It's about what I've purposed in my heart, and will keep purposing until the day I die. My "Yes" on this means "Yes."

That's why in a Christian marriage, it's not about marriage oaths. I don't lead couples in marriage oaths, but an exchange of marriage vows.

There's a difference. The giving and exchanging of your word. And the words are very specific, aren't they?

"Through sickness and in health, in poverty and in prosperity, in good times and in bad... till death do us part."

Jesus said, "Let your 'Yes' to that mean 'Yes.'"

Or don't get married.

#### IV. Three Important Words

So in that context you can understand how these things He was saying about lust, sexual sin, adultery, divorce, oath-breaking were awkward, uncomfortable and convicting.

It was probably very much like how you're feeling right now.

And I know many of you are reeling from this teaching. Some of you may be saying, "If I knew it was going to be like this I wouldn't have even come."

So let me, as your pastor, give you three words.

The **first** is to do exactly what Jesus said to do.

Please stop whatever you need to stop.

In the name of Christ, just stop.

If you've given yourself over to lust and porn;

If you're engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage;

If you're living together;

If you're in an affair;

In the name of Christ, please stop.

You're better than that.

You deserve better than that.

Your current or future spouse deserves better than that.

And most of all, God deserves better than that.

And you can stop.

You can turn things around.

And no one will cheer you on more than God Himself.  
And no one will rally to your side more than this church.  
And no one will have your back as you try more than I will.

Stop sinning sexually against yourself, against others  
and against God.

Get an accountability partner. End the affair.

If you're living together, separate or get married.  
We will help. We can help get you married.

You say, "That will be kind of I mess."

I guarantee you there's no mess we haven't seen. Give  
us a shot.

Don't divorce wrongly.

I don't know what you need to stop, but please do.

That's first.

The **second** word is forgiveness.

For those of you who have fallen into the snare of pornography, you've made a lot of sexual mistakes, you've divorced wrongfully - and I know that many of you have - you need to know that you can be forgiven.

Don't let anybody make you feel that every other sin is forgivable but sexual ones or even marital sins.

Don't let anybody try to tell you that divorce is like a scarlet letter you wear on your chest for the rest of your life.

Don't let them tell you that. Don't you let them make you feel like that. Because it isn't true.

God's Word says that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.

So however you've lived outside of God's perfect will for your life - even a wrongful divorce followed by a wrongful remarriage - seek God's forgiveness, and then begin making Him Lord of the marriage you are now in.

Be committed to that relationship with the commitment that God designed for His followers.

Which brings up a **third** word: commitment.

If I could grab up every married couple on this planet who are struggling, and particularly if I could grab couples who are just starting off...

... after telling them to please put Christ at the center of their marriage, I would have one big mentoring idea to get to them.

Marriage isn't built on a set of circumstances. It's not built on emotion. There is one and only one foundation for marriage - and it's raw meat-eating, bungee-jumping, kamikaze commitment.

And commitment is a choice.

There will be times when you are so angry at your wife.

There will be times your husband is anything but sensitive.

There will be times when you feel betrayed, and when you wonder whether there might be someone else who would make you happier.

And it's then - at those times - that everything is on the line. Because it's then that you are either committed or not.

I know that there is no pain like an unhappy marriage. When Susan and I have gone through difficult seasons (and we have) it's about as bad as it gets.

The pain and ache you feel can be almost unbearable. It dominates your life and your world. You're an emotional wreck.

I know that many of you - right now - are in troubled marriages.

You don't want a divorce, but the alternative is for things to keep going the way that they are, and you just don't feel like you can go another year this way... much less five, ten or twenty.

And if it was just you slugging it out, I couldn't give you that word. But it's not just you - there is a God on the loose. Don't sell Him short.

There is no marital problem so great that He can't solve. That's not trite, that's truth.

You say, "If our marriage makes it, it'll be a miracle!"

Good! That's the business God is in. Rumor has it it's His specialty.

Folks, I've seen marriages which seemed absolutely doomed for destruction get turned around 180 degrees because of the presence and power of the living God.

Because people turned to God for answers, support, strength, insight and help.

So if you're marriage is on the rocks, give God a chance.

I've never seen a marriage fail where both people got down on their knees, held each other's hands and looked up to God and said, "Help!"

Never.

I have seen them fail when one of them is standing up say, "Screw this" while the other one is praying.

So if your marriage is on the rocks, please give God a shot.

And resolve in your heart to be faithful to that commitment, faithful to that vow.

You want me to really rock your world?

If you've already separated, already divorced, and you haven't remarried, and neither has your spouse, let me give you a radical idea.

Work, even now, for reconciliation.

It's still plan "A".

### Conclusion

I once read of three mountain climbers preparing to climb Mt. Everest.

The first two interviewed had extensive skill and enormous physical endurance.

When asked if they would top the mountain, they both answered that they felt they might. That they had a decent chance.

The third man, a small and unskilled climber, answered it differently. When asked if he would complete the climb, he said simply but firmly, "I WILL."

And of the three, he was the only who made it.

Stop. Be forgiven. Be committed.

Until death do you part.

Let's stand for a closing prayer.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://fightthenewdrug.org/10-porn-stats-that-will-blow-your-mind/>