

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 5:27-32*

DATE: *March 3rd, 2019*

LOCATION: *Auditorium (Bill)*

Series: *Whoever Hears These Words*

SERMON: *“Sexual Desire: The Broken and the Beautiful”*

(Acknowledgment to Scot McKnight for insight into divorce and Tim Keller for insight into lust and love)

Okay, just to bring everyone on board, or keep everyone on board - this year the emphasis for us as a congregation is **Knowing, Loving and Following Jesus** (graphic). The first 3 weeks of the year Pastor Shaun got us started as we looked at each of these one by one.

And then in order to keep going and really understand how to follow Jesus, we're working our way through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus addresses all kinds of everyday life issues. Issues that are always before us as we look to follow Him. And it's fascinating how Jesus teaches.

He will bring up an issue and begin with these words: ***“You have heard that it was said...”***

And then Jesus will refer to a law from the Old Testament that the people would have been familiar with. But it's what He does next that grabs our attention. Time and time again He will follow up with these words.. ***“But I tell you...”***

...and then Jesus will expand on what was said in the OT and introduce a much deeper level of understanding. A new way of thinking, a new way of living for those who choose to follow Him *and look to Him to help them do what they cannot do on their own.*

As Pastor Shaun pointed out last week, what Jesus is doing it taking ***“The Letter of the Law”*** and explaining to His followers ***“The Spirit of the Law.”***

Here's what it says...and here's how you live it out as one of my followers.

Our series is called "**Whoever Hears These Words...**" because at the end of this message, Jesus will say that "*Whoever hears these words of mine **and puts them into practice...***" ...is very wise.

And let's acknowledge this: What we hear Jesus calling us to do in order to follow Him isn't always easy. In fact, some people say that what Jesus is looking for is virtually impossible.

But the Brethren in Christ, – and other denominations as well – we read the Sermon on the Mount and believe that this *really* is how Jesus is calling His followers - you and I - to live. ***His presence and His power make it possible to live this way.***

So let's hear what Jesus has to say to us this morning:

Matthew 5:27-32 “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. 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 into 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.

“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 become an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

These are mature topics, mature themes...including misplaced and misguided sexual desires. I imagine some of this is going to hit pretty close to home with many of us. I just want all of you to know up front, that it's my desire to handle this well.

We want to hear from Jesus...but as I look at Jesus, when He looks to address and change our behavior, His approach is never based on shame. Jesus wants to and needs to change certain behaviors in all of our lives, but He never belittles us in doing so.

This morning, as we talk about difficult things, I do not want anyone to feel belittled. But if you sense that Jesus *is* addressing you about certain behaviors, then by all means open up your heart to Him and let Him speak.

This morning's message is titled, **Sexual Desires: The Broken and the Beautiful**. We're going to start with the broken: **Adultery and it's Connection to Lust....Divorce and it's Connection to Sexual Immorality**.

But we don't want to leave here this morning without talking about what is good and what is **Beautiful** about our sexuality, that is, we want to talk about **God's Design For Our Sexual Desires**.

Let's begin by hearing what Jesus says about...

1. ADULTERY AND IT'S CONNECTION TO LUST

Jesus begins with those familiar words, *"You have heard that it was said..."*

Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

Many of the men and women gathered on the hillside know full well that Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament where those words – "You shall not commit adultery" – are found. And adultery in Jesus' day was having sexual relations with someone other than your spouse, and in particular, with somebody else's spouse.

And what is Jesus going to say next? *"But I tell you..."*

Matthew 5:28 **But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

Once again Jesus takes what is written in the Old Testament and takes it to a whole new level, a much deeper and more meaningful level for those who choose to follow Him.

Jesus is introducing a new ethic of sexual purity that goes beyond our actions and extends into our hearts and minds. *Everybody's hearts and minds.*

The Letter of the Law as we see it here is written to men. *The Spirit of the Law* extends to all of us...men, women, married, single, widows and widowers. Why? Because we are all capable of lust...and lust for others is not the same as love for others, is it?

And Simon Blackburn has written a comparison between love and lust, and here's an excerpt from what he has written:

“Lovers look into each others' eyes. Lust looks sideways, inventing deceits and strategies and seductions, sizing up opportunities.

Love pursues the good of the other, with self-control, concern, reason, and patience. Lust pursues its own gratification, headlong, impatient of any control, immune to reason.”

I would imagine that most, if not all of us know what it is to be tempted to lust, to desire sexual relations with someone other than our spouse...or somebody else's spouse...driven by self-gratification. But being tempted isn't a sin, is it?

It rises and falls on whether we resist the temptation or embrace the temptation. And we are so easily deceived. And so God's words of warning need to be heard and understood: **“Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you.” (Genesis 4:7b)**

You may lust after this person, fantasizing about “being with” him or her...But you're not going to act on it, so what does it matter? This is how sin is going to have you. It just lays low, crouching and says, *“Nothing to see here. Go ahead and embrace and entertain the thoughts.”* And if we do, sin has us right where it wants us.

It's how affairs begin. How addiction to pornography begins. How lives and marriages and families are wrecked.

If these misguided and misplaced desires are found within any of us, what is Jesus' remedy?

Matthew 5:29-30 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 into 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.

This is so serious that Jesus invokes the reality of hell, and it's interesting that the term He uses for hell here in this passage is "**Gehenna**." The valley of Gehenna was an actual place outside of Jerusalem where in generations past...kings of Judah would actually sacrifice their children there by fire. As time passed it became a burning garbage pit where the fire was continually smoldering...never really going out.

Jesus is not really looking for us to gouge out our eye or cut off our hand, but keep that image of a smoldering garbage dump in your mind, because we're going to come back to it later.

But first, let's hear what Jesus has to say about...

2. DIVORCE AND IT'S CONNECTION TO SEXUAL IMMORALITY

And it's really difficult to know where to begin, because Divorce in and of itself is such a difficult topic.

Difficult because while many of us know a bit of what the Scriptures say about divorce, if we're honest we admit that we find much of it confusing.

Difficult because of the personal aspect. Whether we have been through it personally or it's been experienced by people that we know and care about...we all understand just how complex and challenging relationships can be. And many of us find it difficult to know how to respond and love those who have gone through and are going through marital difficulties.

Let me say this as we get started: I cannot even hope to weigh in on all of the complexities of this issue of divorce, but let me say that historian and theologian Scot McKnight points out that ***this text is a collection of problems to solve and the discussions are remarkably***

complex. One of the first things McKnight points out is that if we come to this text and read it looking for some reasons to justify divorce, we're missing the whole point.

And so in order not to miss the point, let's address a few of these problems that McKnight identifies in this passage. Let's turn our ears to Jesus and hear what have become familiar words...

Matthew 5:31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’

Just as Jesus did with adultery, He quotes from the Old Testament and by doing so, brings up **The Problem of Permissiveness.**

Jesus is quoting Moses who had said: “...*anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce*”.

And once again, the Jews took this and ran with it. They said, “*Oh, I can divorce my wife as long as I give her one of these certificates.*” And so it ended up that a man could divorce his wife for just about any reason, even if he just tired of her. And interestingly enough, there are documents that indicate occasions where women would divorce their husbands, again for just about any reason. And so by the time Jesus takes a seat on the hillside and begins to preach, divorce had become far too permissive.

And so Jesus is about to bring all this to a screeching halt with another “*But I tell you...*”

Matthew 5:32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Which brings us to a second problem, **The Problem of Marital Unfaithfulness.** What does this mean?

While on the surface it might seem that it could cover all kinds of things – maybe somebody isn't faithful in helping around the home, somebody not faithful in providing, keeping food on the table...it might look like it's open to interpretation. But it really isn't.

Jesus is talking about **“sexual immorality”** and we know this because the Greek word - **“porneia”** - is used in other places throughout the New Testament when speaking specifically about sexual immorality.

And Jesus deems sexual immorality as so broken, so devastating to the love that one should have for his or her spouse, that He allows this as *the one reason* that would make divorce legitimate.

Even as He looks to reign in the permissiveness and help us take seriously our commitment to do the work of marriage...sexual immorality is the one allowance He makes. Even so, we need to remember the words of McKnight who said that if we come here looking for a reason to divorce, we are missing the point. Many marriages have survived and thrived after the husband or the wife embraced misguided sexual desires. While it is an allowance Jesus makes, He is able to redeem and restore that which has been broken.

Let me just say that there are other complex problems in this passage, and other passages as well. What do we make of Paul's expansion to include abandonment as a reason for divorce. Does this address issues such as physical abuse and emotional abuse which are clear signs of brokenness in a marriage relationship.

Let me just say this: For the past 2000 years the Church has approached divorce in different ways. There are churches that do not allow for divorce or remarriage under any circumstances. So committed to truth – *God hates divorce!* - that they fail to show any mercy and understanding towards those who find themselves in desperation circumstances.

On the other end of the spectrum we see those so committed to grace that divorce and remarriage is treated casually and perhaps even carelessly. (McKnight)

The Church has had a difficult time holding truth and grace in balance. As we look to find our way in this very difficult area, may we who are committed to knowing, loving and following Jesus look to Him, for He always seemed to be able to hold truth and grace in perfect balance.

Perhaps the best thing I have to offer is this: We need to be willing to invest much time in the lives of those in our church who are struggling and whose marriages are in danger. If we're not willing to come along side of our brothers and sisters and listen, encourage, challenge, love....any opinions that we want to express on the topic of divorce and remarriage will most likely carry little weight.

So what we have here in today's passage are adultery and divorce...and connected to both of them is sexual brokenness.

The thing is - and this might surprise some people - we know that sexual desires do not have to be broken. We know this because we see God upholding sexual desire at various places in the Scriptures. In Proverbs we read about how a husband should be ravished by his wife's body...the Song of Songs talks about the pleasure and delight that comes from physical love between a man and woman.

And so I think it's important to also consider...

3. GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR SEXUAL DESIRES

To understand God's intent, God's design, we have to go back to how Jesus got this whole conversation started:

Matthew 5:27-32 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

This meant no sex outside of a marriage relationship. But if we're going to be able to grasp God's design for our sexual desires, we need to understand that marriage is more than a relationship...it is actually **a Covenant**.

You see, when a man and a woman make plans to marry, they go to the courthouse and they get a marriage license prior to the ceremony. And this marriage license is important for us as pastors – we sign off on them after performing a service – and this license is *very important* to the state.

But when I am doing a wedding for a couple, I remind them that we are not just looking for the recognition of the state, we are looking for the recognition of God. Yes, we are talking about marriage, but what we are really talking about is a Covenant. **A unique relationship far more loving...far more intimate...trusting...deep than they will ever experience with even their closest of friends.**

Genesis chapter 2...opening pages of the Scriptures....

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and they will become one flesh.

They will become as one. On many different levels. Physically, emotionally, mentally.

When I do pre-marital counseling, there are a couple of things that are near and dear to my heart, one of them may seem trivial, but I think it's huge. There is this event that occurs within just a few hours after the man and woman become husband and wife. It takes place at the reception when the wedding cake is cut. The first two pieces are handed to the bride and groom, and they offer it, they feed it to the one they have just married, the one that they have entered into this covenant.

I was talking to one of my close friends about this moment, and she told me that for her, that moment at her wedding was deeply meaningful to her and her husband...it wasn't sharing communion, but still, it was bonding and incredibly meaningful to them.

Somehow we have come up with this notion that instead of offering and feeding the cake to our spouse, that it's funny if we smear it in his or her face. And I tell the couple, under no circumstances is that to happen. Your friends might be egging you on, everybody around you might be telling you to smear it...but don't do it.

This is your first opportunity to decide *“Is this relationship about me? Or them. Or is it about us?”* A covenant includes not only love and intimacy, but respect and trust.

Now why am I talking so much about this covenant? And it’s because it is within this covenant relationship that our sexual desires are expressed and fulfilled. I tell many of the couples I am preparing to marry: They can and should experience tremendous physical and emotional and mental intimacy through the expression and fulfillment of their sexual desires.

When this happens, this physical union becomes almost like **a sacrament. And a sacrament is an outward expression of an inner reality.**

Baptism for instance. Baptism is an outward expression – immersion by water - of an inner reality – a heart that has committed to following Jesus. Communion is an outward expression – the bread, the cup - of this inner awareness of the fact that Jesus gave His life, His blood, for me.

In the same way, the sexual intimacy becomes an outward expression of what husbands and wives do in every aspect of the covenant relationship.

You see, there’s not just the physical aspect, but an emotional and mental aspect as well....an act of self-giving and vulnerability that can lead to incredible security and trust in this covenant relationship.

If we follow God’s plan it is possible to achieve this level of trust, you don’t have to worry about your spouse comparing you to and lusting after the person they work with, somebody on the computer screen, or the person who is just passing by.

I hope you can see why God’s design for our sexual desires is for them to be expressed and fulfilled in the marriage covenant relationship.

C.S. Lewis wrote, ***“The monstrosity of sexual relations outside of marriage, is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union – the sexual – from all other kinds of union. To have physical union without having “whole life” union is a lack of***

integrity. But when you have sex in a covenant relationship, it becomes in a sense, a covenant renewal ceremony. It is incredibly meaningful and nurturing and further deepens the covenant.”

Now...I need to address three groups of people.

First, those of you who are married but what I have been describing here is foreign to you. I would encourage you and your spouse to set aside some time this week to just sit down and **talk about God’s design when it comes to the expression and fulfillment of sexual desires...and the importance of embracing the covenant relationship you’ve committed to.** This is how we resist the temptation to lust. This makes the possibility of divorce not even on the map.

Second group, those of you who are married, single, young, older...and rather than resisting lust, you find yourself embracing it. There is something profound in the words of Jesus when He refers to Gehenna, **that garbage dump that sometimes burns...sometimes smolders...but the fire never really goes out.**

I wonder if Jesus uses this imagery to help you see: If you choose to embrace lust in your heart, your heart will be like a smoldering fire that never goes out. **Always searching and longing – and at times you will think that you found it! Only to discover that you didn’t.**

Throughout your life there will be this endless smoldering, trying to find fulfillment through fantasy, pornography or even in actual relationships.

In John’s gospel we read about a women who – I imagine for a variety of reasons – was experiencing great difficulty in her experiences with men.

She was from Samaria, and some of you know of her encounter with Jesus at a well. At one point He said to her, “I’ve got water that will satisfy, a water that if you drink of it you will never be thirsty again.”

“Sir,” she said, “give me this water.”

“Bring me your husband,” Jesus said.

“I don’t have a husband.”

Jesus said, “That’s right. The truth is, you’ve had five husbands, and the man you are now living with is not your husband.”

The life she has lived is not that much different than the lives many of us have lived. Many of us men have “had” numerous women throughout our lives... in our hearts and in our minds. There are women in this room who have “had” numerous men, in their hearts and minds.

And what Jesus was trying to point out to this woman, and to any here today who can relate to her...what you are looking for can only be found in **a covenant relationship** with Him. *“I’ve got water that will satisfy, a water that if you drink of it you will never be thirsty again.”*

If you don’t believe that, your life will be....Gehenna...a smoldering fire that never goes out. Sometimes you’ll think you’ve found it. Only to discover you didn’t. Never satisfied.

Third group...those of you who have sexual desires and want to follow Jesus, but do not find yourself in a covenant relationship that would fit God’s design. Either you are not married, or the person you are married to is not physically able or simply not willing to embrace God’s design. This is very difficult.

I believe that Jesus would want you to know that **the covenant relationship between a husband and wife can be beautiful, but even at its very best is actually just a taste of the covenant relationship you – or anyone - can have with Him.** I believe that if you pursue Jesus...you will learn from Him how to find fulfillment in Him.

You see, when we say we follow Him, we do not do so from a distance. We sit at His feet, we talk with Him and listen for Him to speak to us. He’s living in us! And as we spend time with Him, we come to find that it ***is incredibly meaningful and nurturing and further deepens the covenant.***

PRAYER