



# Sermon on the Mount: An Invitation to New Creation

## Session 5

### “Healthy Relationships”

The other day, my daughter asked our neighbor which political party she supported. I was a bit horrified in the moment, and later had a conversation with her that there are certain topics that are a bit sensitive for people, so it's really not polite to bring up those topics. However, in Matthew 5:27-37, Jesus abandons our modern societal norms about sensitive topics, and dives right into addressing some “hot topics” in his sermon. After telling people that anger is as dangerous to the soul as murder, he continues on to compare lust with adultery, and then jumps right into the subject of divorce. How's that for polite dinner conversation? To conclude, he moves on to the issue of oaths, perhaps not as sensitive of a topic for us, but one that certainly doesn't normally come up in everyday conversation. I wonder if Jesus' original audience felt as uncomfortable listening to him preach as we might feel talking about these sensitive topics in church today?

Yet, just because these subjects might cause us to feel a little bit uncomfortable, it doesn't mean we should shy away from these conversations. In fact, as people who desire to follow in the way of Jesus, it reminds us that Jesus has something to say about all aspects of our lives and relationships. Jesus has something to say about the tough relational topics that people rarely bring up, but cause heartache and brokenness more than we'd like to admit. Jesus cares about the secret part of our thought lives, and tells us that our thoughts matter as much as our actions. Jesus says that the words we speak to one another matter, and that all commitments should be taken seriously. So, as you dive into these topics as a group—let's wade past the discomfort, be willing to take a deeper look into our own lives and ask Jesus to open our eyes to God's desire for healthy relationships.

#### **Matthew 5:27-37**

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, 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.

31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

**“it is crucial to observe that Matthew’s construction implies that the sin lies not in the entrance of a thought but in letting it incite a wrongful passion. One could translate: ‘Everyone looking upon a woman in order to lust after her...’ Jesus is talking not about feelings but about intentions, and so the sin he condemns lies not in the entrance of desire but in what one does with that desire. Luther got it right: ‘It is impossible to keep the devil from shooting evil thoughts and lusts into your heart. But see to it that you do not let such arrows stick there and take root, but tear them out and throw them away’ (*Sermon on the Mount*, 88). And long before Luther, Evagrius observed: ‘It is not in our power to determine whether we are disturbed by these thoughts, but it is up to us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they are to stir up our passions’ (*Praktikos*, 6). Matt. 5:27-37 is really about controlling the imagination—not about the eyes so much as the soul that uses them.”**

**-- Dale Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 74**

## Questions for Discussion

1. What stood out to you, encouraged you or challenged you from this past Sunday’s sermon?
2. Jesus deepens our understanding of the law by equating lust with adultery, reminding us that sin often begins with thoughts that run wild. Why do you think Jesus suggests that our thoughts are as important as our actions? How does the quote by Dale Allison help you understand the difference between fleeting thoughts and desires that snowball into something that becomes destructive to our souls?
3. In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus uses hyperbole to make a point about temptation. What do you think Jesus is trying to say in verses 29-30? If this is not a literal call to maim one’s body in order to avoid temptation, what extreme measures might one take to deal with the temptation to lust (or any temptation for that matter)?
4. In order to understand Jesus’ instructions on divorce, it is helpful to know the context in which they were given. The law permitted men to give their wives a certificate of divorce, and because of this, the Pharisees of Jesus’ day viewed divorce lightly, permitting divorce for any reason. In a patriarchal culture, Jesus’ instructions were given to protect women from the ramifications of divorce, in which they often would be left vulnerable. Why is this understanding important as we seek to understand what Jesus has to say about marriage and divorce in our present context? How might looking to scripture as a whole help us avoid legalism and allow for grace around this sensitive topic?
5. What is Jesus suggesting by telling people that oaths are not necessary in our everyday interactions? What are some ways we struggle to follow the advice of Jesus: “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’”?
6. What do you think is most challenging about Jesus’ teaching on these topics? What do you learn about God’s heart for healthy relationships?
7. In this passage, Jesus elevates both the importance of our thoughts and our words. As you reflect on these two areas of your life, where would you like prayer?