

GLENKIRK CHURCH



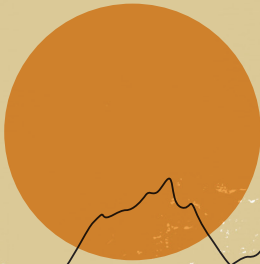
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

SEPTEMBER 18 - 22, 2023

Re-Formed:

Sermon on the Mount



Sermon Series 9/3 - 11/26

MONDAY

Read **Matthew 5:27-37**

In Matthew 5, Jesus addresses the topics of adultery, divorce, and oath-making. It can be tempting to see these as three completely separate topics—and while there are things to learn about them individually, these three topics share one important element: covenant.

The God of the Bible is a God of covenant. Throughout Scripture, God has made covenants with humans, promising to be their God if they would be God's people. Perhaps the most well-known covenants are those made with Abraham (Genesis 15), Moses (Exodus 34), and the “new covenant” ushered in by Jesus (Hebrews 8-9).

Today we might think of marriage as a modern example of a covenant. In marriage two people take an oath to be faithful to one another for the duration of their shared life. You can see then why adultery, divorce, and oath-making are connected, because adultery is straying from the one you have entered into covenant with, divorce is severing that covenantal relationship, and oath-making is the means by which one is bound to a covenant.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not merely giving us a list of “dos and don'ts.” This is not a cold, detached list of rules to follow. Rather, Jesus is aware of our situation and sympathetic to our plight. Jesus sees our brokenness and speaks to “real human situations that

reflect our bondage to sin.” (Stassen and Gushee) And as an answer to our problems, He doesn’t give us a black-and-white list of behaviors to follow. Instead, He points to the character and heart of God so that the conversation about adultery, divorce, and oath-making reveals who God is: God is faithful, God takes oaths seriously, and God keeps His promises. In so doing, Jesus gives us a new, covenantal understanding of marriage and keeping one’s word.

QUESTIONS

What ideas do you have about the topics that Jesus addresses in this passage? Do your ideas about these topics reflect more of a list of “dos and don’ts,” or do they point back to the character and love of God? How might God’s character in these areas affect the way we understand them?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for the students inside Iran. Many of them are struggling with financial and family pressures. Pray for their family lives, marriages, and parents as they juggle living a faithful life with all of their daily responsibilities.

TUESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:27-30**

Our world has a superficial view of sexuality, one that views sex like an appetite that can be satisfied in a similar way that a craving can be satisfied by a chocolate bar. Our culture's view of sex teaches us to see others as commodities to be used for our own gratification. And we see the negative effects of this in our society.

In Matthew 5, Jesus addresses sexuality when He teaches about sex within the covenantal relationship of marriage. Here Jesus reiterates the ancient command, "*You shall not commit adultery*" (Exodus 20:14), and then speaks to the dangerous cycle of lust. For if you look at someone "*with the intent to lust after that person*" (v. 28 paraphrased), then a quick notice of another's attractiveness or adoring attention is allowed to turn into a desire for that person. This can quickly grab hold of the mind and cause someone to turn away from the covenantal commitments they have made as they seek to turn that desire into action.

Jesus warns us against allowing our minds to go there, teaching that looking at others with the intent to lust after them is like committing adultery in our hearts because that is where it leads when left unchecked. So what's the solution? Jesus advises us to cut out of our lives anything that tempts us to be unfaithful. If something in your life keeps causing you to lust, remove that thing. Stop the cycle of sin before it begins.

Adultery is straying from the commitment of a covenantal relationship in marriage. By addressing adultery and oath-taking together, Jesus *re-forms* our view of sexuality and gives us a deeper understanding of it. Sexuality has to do with integrity, character, and following through on the commitments we've made. Sexual character isn't a question of *what you would do if you could*; it is a question of *what kind of person you are*. Jesus encourages us to steward our sexuality well, within the framework of marriage, reflecting the character of God in how we conduct ourselves. After all, God is faithful, God takes oaths seriously, and God keeps His promises. Can the same be said of us?

QUESTIONS

How is sexual behavior within the prescribed limits of God's best related to God's covenant relationship with His people? What are some of the problems with lusting after another, particularly outside of the confines of a married relationship?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for our students who have been interrogated recently by the Revolutionary Guard. (We will send more details shortly.) Pray that God will guide them through this adversity and provide them with a way out of dire circumstances.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-9; Jeremiah 3:6-8**

When Jesus was asked questions about what constitutes a legitimate divorce, He didn't always answer the questions directly, using such circumstances for teaching. Rather than taking sides in a heated debate, Jesus pivoted. He referenced God's intent for marriage to be a covenant of faithful care, mutual love, and oneness. He reframed the conversation from one about "dos and don'ts" to one about God's heart.

In Jesus' day, some people were teaching that men could divorce their wives for any reason at all. This led to the cheapening of marriage—that it was something fleeting, temporary, not very serious. This view also put women at a great disadvantage: rather than being seen and valued as if they were one flesh with their husbands, they were seen as expendable. That is not God's design for marriage.

While the teachers of the law were getting caught up in the legalism of behavior checklists, Jesus brought the conversation back to the idea of covenant. Jesus' words were meant to remind them of God's vision of marriage and to call them to stop taking marriage lightly.

Throughout Scripture, the analogy of marriage is utilized to describe God's relationship to God's people. God entered into a covenant relationship with His people. And while God was continually faithful, the people were not. The prophet Jeremiah paints a picture of God

as a heartbroken spouse whose partner has not held up his or her end of the bargain. As a result, Jeremiah says that God gave Israel a certificate of divorce. It is true that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). But it seems that God hates divorce not because God is being judgmental toward those who have undergone divorce, but because God understands the heartbreak and plight of a divorcee.

Historically the Church has not handled conversations regarding divorce well. Rather than being a place of welcome, comfort, and healing for those experiencing divorce, too often the Church has added to the hurt that people go through in those situations. Conversations about what constitutes a legitimate divorce are common, but are rarely helpful. May Glenkirk Church be a place where all people can find loving community and healing. For a good resource on the topic, read *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* by David Instone-Brewer.

QUESTIONS

In what ways were Jesus' teachings on divorce radically progressive in 1st century Israel? Why does God hate divorce (not divorcees, but divorce itself)?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for our students in Turkey who face heavy financial pressure because of Turkey's economic situation. Some are in danger of deportation and their situation is uncertain.

THURSDAY

Read **Matthew 5:33-37, John 14:1-6**

What is the purpose of taking an oath or making a promise? Why do we do it? One might say, “To make a commitment that we will keep our word.” Another might say, “To emphasize how serious we are being in that moment.” But what does this say about the reliability of our word when we are not making a promise? Can people count on us to do what we say we will do? Are we people who speak the truth?

Jesus addresses the issue of oath-taking, teaching that rather than swearing on anything, a simple “yes” or “no” is sufficient. Our word should be enough. This underscores the importance of truthfulness in our lives. In the Sermon on the Mount, truth-telling holds a paramount significance as it reflects a foundational principle of ethical living. Jesus encourages us to practice truth-telling all the time, to be people who say what we mean and do what we say.

This principle extends beyond mere words, encompassing thoughts and intentions as well. Upholding the truth promotes a just and compassionate society rooted in authenticity and sincerity. Truthful living fosters trust, respect and integrity within relationships and communities. Those committed to telling the truth with their words and their lives embody a commitment to transparency, humility and accountability.

This is a reflection of the character of God. God means what God says. God is trustworthy and God can be counted on to keep His word. Although these teachings can help us to see what areas we need to be *re-formed* in, they are not a behavior checklist. They point back to God, centering the conversation around who God is and what kind of people we are called to be as disciples. Being a disciple is not about behavior modification; it is about being *formed* in our character, being truly changed from the inside out.

Dallas Willard taught that we have all been formed spiritually; the question is whether that formation was a good one or not. (*Christianity Today* Interview) The goal of this sermon series is to let Jesus' words emphasize areas where we as followers of Jesus need to be *re-formed* as disciples. After all, Jesus *is* the way, the truth, and the life. As followers of Jesus, truthfulness should characterize us as well.

QUESTIONS

How can oath-taking indicate character issues, at least regarding greater culture? How does keeping promises honor God?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for our counselors as they serve our student body and the larger Persian community with guidance and discernment. Pray that God will provide them with comfort and spiritual nourishment as they carry many burdens and listen to stories of trauma.

FRIDAY

Read **Matthew 5:27-37**

In Matthew 5:27-37, Jesus addresses matters of the heart and character, emphasizing the deeper spiritual significance of our actions and intentions. In a world where appearances are emphasized, Christ's teaching serves as a guide to navigate the path of integrity of character and purity in thought, word and deed.

Jesus begins by addressing the commandment against adultery. While this might seem like a straightforward prohibition, He extends the understanding beyond the physical act to the realm of intention and desire. Accordingly, He underscores the importance of guarding our hearts against lustful thoughts, recognizing that the seeds of sin are sown in the mind. This message resonates powerfully in today's society, reminding us of our need to be *re-formed* into the character of our God who is faithful.

The passage then shifts to the significance of truthfulness in speech. Jesus advises against making oaths, highlighting that our words should be a reflection of our character and integrity. Instead of relying on elaborate promises, we are encouraged to speak truthfully in all circumstances. Honesty is a virtue that shows our personal integrity and genuine character. In a world where deception can be enticing, this teaching reminds us of the importance of being *re-formed* into the character of our God who is truth.

Christ's teachings in this passage call for wholehearted commitment to a life of purity and authenticity. They encourage us to take a serious look at our inner thoughts and outward expressions. Through these words, our need for God becomes apparent and we are challenged to seek Jesus' transformation of our intentions and behaviors, aligning them with God's character.

As we reflect on Matthew 5:27-37, let us examine our hearts, recognizing the power of our thoughts and words to shape our lives and reveal character. May we strive to know the character of God more and more, and in so doing allow God to cultivate a holiness within us, extending beyond mere actions to the depths of who we are.

May God grant us the strength to speak truthfully in all situations, cultivating a character of integrity and authenticity. May God *re-form* us into people who value and uphold our covenants. In a world where compromise and falsehood can appeal to some, let us be people of our word, faithful and true like the God we worship.

QUESTIONS

What does the felt need to make oaths sometimes symptomize?
How does the reality that "God is truth" guide you?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for our staff as they plan for the third Iranian Leaders Forum that Pars hosts in October 2023. We hope that over 120 Iranian leaders from many different ministries and organizations will be represented as together we reflect on the following theme: "One Body in Christ: How to Prepare in Unity for God's Kingdom Dreams in Iran."

Sources

- Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church: Biblical Solutions for Pastoral Realities* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).
- Dallas Willard Interview, “The Making of the Christian,” *Christianity Today*, October 2005, Vol. 49, No. 10.

