

**Matthew Study 7 (29-Mar-2017) : Matthew 5:27-30 (adultery); 31-32; 19:3-11 (divorce)**

**Opening Question:**

*Possibly about calliagnosia (calli:beauty; agnosia:ignorance) - would it be a good thing?  
I recently read a science fiction book where it was possible to have an operation to turn on and off the bit of your brain which can tell how good looking people are. If such an operation were available, do you think it would be a good idea?*

*This term we're looking at the NT book "Matthew"*

*What can we remember about the book of Matthew so far? want the following bullet points:*

- *Jesus' birth*
- *John the Baptist*
- *Temptation in the wilderness*
- *Disciples, miracles*
- *Sermon on the mount - Beatitudes*
- *"You have heard it said...but I tell you"*

*Look at the headings in chapter 5, "Murder", "Adultery", "Divorce", "Oaths", "Eye for Eye", "Love for Enemies"*

*Q: What is going on in these passages?*

*A: Jesus is clarifying the meaning of the law; correcting false interpretation from Pharisees, telling people how to live.*

*Someone has described this part of the sermon on the mount as the "Kingdom Rules" - the rules we ought to follow as citizens of the kingdom.*

*Q: When Jesus explains these "Kingdom Rules", is he telling us how to get right with God?*

*A: No. ... we're already right with God*

*Q: If we're already right with God, why are these rules of interest to us?*

*A: Partly to honour God (show fruits of the spirit). Partly because these rules are their for our benefit: God knows what's best for us - they're not arbitrary lists of prohibitions that are designed to annoy us*

*We don't follow the rules to get into the kingdom—the only way to get in is by trusting in what Jesus has done for us. The reason we follow the rules is because we are already in the kingdom. Since we trust God to tell us the truth, when he says something is off limits, we believe that he's got our best interests at heart and that he's trying to spare us from the pain and destruction that sin would produce if we gave it the chance.*

*But as Jesus lays out the Kingdom Code, it becomes obvious that he is explaining not just the letter of the law, but also the spirit of the law, the law's intent. Jesus says it's not enough to avoid certain external sinful behaviours. We also need to honour God with our thoughts, our motives and our attitudes—the inner things only God can know about us.*

*Q: A pattern we've seen in these passages is Jesus saying "You have heard...but I tell you". Why does Jesus use this way of speaking?*

*A: He's making the contrast between what the people have been led to understand by the religious speakers who have interpreted the law in ways which aren't true to the way it was intended*

**Read Matthew 5:27-30**

*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.*

Note we see again the pattern “You have heard it said...But I tell you”

Q: Where would the audience have heard it said “You shall not commit adultery”?

A: Exodus 20:14, Deut 5:18 - 7th commandment. Also in Leviticus 20:10

Q: What is adultery?

A: dictionary “voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not their spouse”. But based on other teaching throughout the NT, it is fairly clear that this refers to any sexual activity outside marriage.

*In fact, according to the laws of the time, it was not adultery for a married man to sleep with an unmarried woman; that’s because “adultery” was interpreted as a form of theft, and the harm came from stealing another man’s property (his wife).*

Q: Is Jesus saying that to “look at a woman lustfully” is exactly the same as committing adultery?

A: He doesn’t say someone “has already committed adultery” but that they have “already committed adultery with her in his heart” - so it’s not exactly the same. It is wrong to commit adultery, and it is also wrong (but different) to desire an “off-limits” relationship

Q: If “looking at a woman lustfully” isn’t the same as committing adultery, why is it wrong?

A: Two reasons: 1. Sexual sin starts with something very small and innocent—something that looks so harmless, it’s easy to allow. It starts with a desire but can easily lead to more. Clive gave an example of someone who turned up at a friend’s house - when she called him in she was lying naked on the bed: he literally turned and ran away. 2. Even if it doesn’t lead to action, it’s damaging to get into thought patterns of this type. Too easy to let these thoughts take over. Associated with shame, won’t be something to feel good about with God.

Q: Is it wrong to find someone attractive when it’s not your spouse?

A: Being attracted to someone is often a response, not a choice. But what starts off as an automatic response might be something we are tempted to focus on and that might lead us into sinful behaviour

*Possible connection: callagnosia. David Pawson saying in some ways blind people are fortunate because they don’t have the temptations that sighted people do*

Q: Why is adultery such a bad thing?

A: God’s design is for sex to be part of marriage: it wasn’t “designed” to work outside marriage, and He knows that when it’s misused then harm results. I.e. it’s a case of following the maker’s instructions.

Q: What are the potential downsides of adultery?

A: Broken relationships/marriage; broken trust; STI, unwanted pregnancy...When Clive’s spoken about this then he often quotes statistics which confirm the view that lives (partners and children) work better in the context of a marriage relationship.

Q: How seriously are we to take Jesus’ comments about cutting out our eyes/hands?

A: Not literally

Q: Why does he use this kind of language then?

A: The point is that sexual purity in thought and deed is very important: so important that it’s worth sacrificing some good things if we might otherwise be led into sin.

### **Read Matthew 5:31-32**

*31 “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’[f] 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.*

### **Read Matthew 19:3-11**

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'[a] 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'[b]? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

*You don't have to do it, but if I asked people to put their hands up if they or anyone in their immediate family has been through divorce, how many hands would we see? Quite a lot: divorce is not unusual!*

Q: What do you think society's attitude to divorce is?

A: *sad but unavoidable*

Q: What do you think society would say about the church's attitude to divorce?

A: *Maybe that it's too hard on divorcees? Maybe that it's too soft!*

Q: What do you think is God's attitude to divorce?

A: *Doesn't think it's a good thing*

Q: Why do you think God disapproves of divorce?

A: *Because it goes against his plan, which is for man and woman to be united in marriage and have a family. Again, stats quoted by Clive show the benefits to society of stable marriages: it's by following the maker's instructions that we can flourish*

In these passages, there is mention made of a "certificate of divorce". To see where this comes from, read Deut 24:1-4

Deut 24:1-4 "**If** a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, **and** he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, 2 **and if** after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 **and** her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, 4 **then** her first husband, who divorced her, is **not allowed** to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."

Q: What does Jesus say about the certificate in 5:31?

A: *"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'*

Q: What do the Pharisees say about the certificate of divorce in 19:7?

A: *Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?*

Q: Reading these two verses, what do you think the Pharisees understood (and taught people) about the "certificate of divorce" What did they think that the passage in Deuteronomy meant?

A: *They thought that divorce was fine so long as you wrote a certificate of divorce*

Q: Is that what the Deuteronomy passage actually says? Can you see what the **command** is in Deuteronomy 24:1-4?

A: Moses is saying "if [this] and [this] and [this]... then **he is not allowed to marry her again**. So the point of this passage is teaching against remarriage. It's not saying that "divorce is permitted so long as you have a certificate"

So the Pharisees had been trying to say that divorce was fine, so long as you go through some process to get a certificate. Jesus is making it clear that Moses' teaching was not focused on God's attitude to divorce; rather he is explaining how Moses made provision for cases where the people did not follow God's rules.

Q: If divorce is not simply a matter of handing over a certificate, when do these verses say that divorce is permitted?

A: on grounds of sexual immorality. I.e. someone can divorce their spouse if their spouse has committed adultery

Q: What does v9 mean then ("I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery")?

A: In God's eyes, the marriage is not broken if no adultery has been committed, and so a subsequent marriage would be adulterous. It wouldn't make any difference whether a "certificate" has been issued or not. So long as the marriage is not broken, there is the potential for it to be mended.

*In God's eyes, marriage involves the union of a man and woman, and that union cannot be broken. The Pharisees of Jesus' time said that you could just issue a certificate of divorce, and some people used this as a way to move from one partner to the next. Jesus corrects this view.*

*Note some argue that other cases justify divorce, see Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 "12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.*

*15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.*

#### Takeaway

- Desire can be an alarm; recognise it and take action - run away!
- We should follow the maker's instructions - for our own good