

DID JESUS REALLY SAY THAT?

The R-Rated Gospel: Sex, Lust, Divorce and Marriage

Matthew 5:27-32

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I preached a sermon one Sunday morning several years ago in which I was fairly explicit about sex and marriage. Afterward, one of your youth came up to me and thanked me for being so frank. She said she wished that the church would be this clear all the time and she was grateful. What I said was this: what we do with our bodies, we do with our entire personalities. The phrase "casual sex" is an oxymoron, like saying we want a shallow/deep relationship, or we want a temporary/permanent one. Sexual relations always complicate things when they precede commitment. Of all places, a Tom Cruise movie ("Vanilla Sky") has a great line. Cruise has a fling with a young lady who then follows him around. When he makes it clear he isn't interested in commitment, she says, "Don't you know that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not?"

By the way, it truly is a shame that the Church has been so quiet through the years regarding human sexuality. So into this vacuum flowed many wrong notions of sex. The Greek idea is that the body and soul are split. From there, it isn't far to the Playboy philosophy that what I do with my body is my business and has nothing to do with my soul. Dallas Willard points out the futility of all this, reminding us that we cannot get from sex what is only possible in a committed relationship of marriage [*The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 163].

So Jesus talks to us this morning about sex, lust, divorce and marriage. I get amused with people who claim the Bible has nothing to do with real life. Jesus wades into real life and concrete issues. Several years ago, Vatican II came out and the fourth goal states a desire to get us in dialogue with the real world, not the world as church people want to see it. So be it!

WHAT IS JESUS SAYING ABOUT LUST? Not a great deal, but he was oh-so-clear! Read vv. 27-28. Did Jesus really say that? Actually, the phrase, "looks at a woman with lust" could better be translated, "looks on a woman with the purpose of desiring her." The idea is the continued fantasizing, looking with the aim of desiring her. It means desiring to desire something. You know the old saying: You can't keep the birds from landing on your head, but you can keep them from building a nest. Jesus said, "No nests!" Jesus does not say don't look; he says don't lust. Do not turn another person into an object.

Here's an interesting thought. Jesus was pretty revolutionary for his day. He included women in his band of disciples. He makes it clear that he expects the male disciples to keep their eyes and hands to themselves.

WHAT IS JESUS SAYING ABOUT DIVORCE? Read vv. 31-32. Did Jesus really say that? You see, one ditch to be avoided in this discussion is the ditch of license (anything goes...divorce for any reason or no reason). The other ditch to be avoided is legalism (rules are most important). License throws out the rules. Legalism throws out the person. Jesus found a third way. Jesus never says divorce is the unpardonable sin. Think about the grace Jesus offered the woman at the well in John 4. She had been married five times and was living with a man to whom she was not married. Or think about the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Jesus' compassion was real toward her. We all fail to keep some parts of the Sermon on the Mount (gossip, judging others, worry, failure at prayer, speaking cruel words). Is anybody here keeping all the Sermon on the Mount? Then stop acting like divorce makes someone a second class citizen!

At first, we may see Jesus' words as negative. But he is saying some very powerful, positive things. First, Jesus is saying something very positive about marriage. God intends marriage to be a covenant for a lifetime, and to be exclusive. Think about the meaning of covenant. I heard a man say once that the difference between a covenant and a contract is that you can get out of a contract and it doesn't change you. But when we break a covenant, it changes us and the other person. What a gift this marriage covenant is--with its very high walls, to keep us safely in.

Second, Jesus is saying something very positive about women. In his teachings about both lust and divorce, he is elevating women to a place of dignity and worth. You don't just ogle a woman as if she is a one-dimensional poster and you don't just divorce her because she's not the latest version of Barbie Doll. In other words, Jesus was showing us how to treat women with respect. To all the boys and young men here this morning, hear me carefully. You treat women with respect. You honor them. You treat them with the dignity they deserve! And to the young ladies, I say hear me carefully. Don't settle for a man who abuses you, uses you sexually or disrespects you. Settle for nothing less than a man who will honor you! That is God's plan!

Third, Jesus is saying something very positive about discipleship--what it means to follow him. In v. 29, he calls us to rigorous discipline. He calls out the best in us. I can't do this by myself. This commandment drives me to my knees and to my Lord. Jesus is announcing a new King, a new Kingdom, a new relationship with the opposite sex. A new self-discipline. It's the Jesus way.