

Sunday Sermon

10/1/23

Series: Raising the Bar

Passage: Matt. 5:27-37

Title: Adultery, Divorce, and Vows

Good morning church! Before we jump into the sermon this morning, I've asked Andrew (Robynlyn) to come and share with us an ongoing testimony that has come out of the school supplies outreach we did at the end of August.

Amen! It's amazing to see how God opens up opportunities for us to share his love and be a blessing through a simple act of compassion. You will hear this often throughout our series, we are salt and light. We are salt and light. A living presence in this world of God's truth and love. Salt and light.

This morning we are continuing our series "Raising the Bar," a series through the Sermon on the Mount. Please turn in your bibles to Matt. 5:27-37. The sermon on the mount is a series of teachings directly from the mouth of Jesus. Throughout his sermon, Jesus is "raising the bar" concerning our perception of righteousness. Remember that he was speaking to a people who approached God through this framework: **God will accept me if I am good enough.**

But Jesus says, "Let's examine that. If you want to measure your being "good enough" by your ability to live according to God's law, then let's raise the bar to the actual standard of holiness that the law points to and see how we measure up."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." The poor in spirit are those who recognize their spiritual depravity, their need for a Savior. **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** Remember that the main idea for this series is this: We could never be good enough to not be guilty of sin, to not be liable to judgment. Therefore, we need an alternative righteousness. We need a Savior, who is Jesus Christ the Lord.

Matthew 5:20, **"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven."**

So that said, it's time to put our big boy pants on this morning. Turn to your neighbor and say, "This one's gonna be hard." It's tasty to eat candy all the time, but sometimes what we need are vegetables. Our passage this morning covers God's standard, God's heart, concerning Adultery, Lust, Divorce, and Oaths. You will notice in your bibles that these topics are separated into several chunks in the chapter. We are covering all of them because they are all related to one another. The headings you see in your bible aren't in the original language. These are all related point at the same thing. Jesus wants to teach us concerning our faithfulness to our word and how that exposes our sinfulness before the Lord. Look at God's word with me this morning: **Matt. 5:27-37.**

Today is an exciting day. You know that? It's an exciting day because this afternoon at 1:00 the Buffalo Bills and the Miami Dolphins two of the best teams in the NFL are going to play each other and the game should be, if nothing else, a good watch. Now if you're not into football don't check out, track with me for a moment. What makes these teams good? It's not physical ability alone. It's not individual players. It's not raw talent. It's preparation and practice. These teams only become formidable on the field because of the work that is put in off the field.

The day after game day, teams gather to watch game film. Every play is broken down. Each person's responsibility is laid out. Every player's performance is examined. So that they know where they stand. They see what they need to be doing differently, so that next time it happens they are ready – they are prepared – to respond in a certain way. Then knowing their responsibilities, they go out and practice.

Our passage this morning is a bit like that game film. These areas of life are so practical for us that it's a bit like our coach telling us, "Here's the play. What are you doing? Have you taken on your responsibility? Are you doing your part on the field?"

Because when we are not doing our part, that's when things break down.

When it comes to our righteousness before God. The truth is that it doesn't take long for game film to expose that maybe we are not as righteous as often we think we are.

Verse 27, ***"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'"*** Adultery is something that God forbids in the 10 Commandments. Actually, I find this funny. We read the 10 Commandment in English as "You shall not _____." But in Hebrew it's actually more of a heading or a list. It actually says, "Adultery: Not Adultery." "Steal: not steal" It's like one of those signs with the red circle and the line through it. Not that. Adultery can be understood as sexual intercourse between a married person and a person who is not his or her spouse.

Now let's be clear, sex is good. But God designed sex to be expressed as a form of relational intimacy between a man and a woman who have been united for life. Adultery is the violation of that covenant promise.

If you are married, we all remember standing before God and before our spouse and taking a vow, an oath. It probably went something like: "For better, for worse. For richer, for poorer. In sickness, and in health. Forsaking all others, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow."

Adultery is not about sex outside of marriage, that is a sermon for another time. Adultery is about the breaking of an oath, a promise. It is an act of faithlessness in the eyes of a God who is entirely faithful. And God says, "No bueno." That's not like me. That's evil.

Jesus, says, "I agree with that." But like we saw with murder last week, **Jesus is about to expose that there are many more ways that we act faithlessly, and therefore fall short, than simply committing adultery.**

And from here, Jesus exposes three ways that the **human heart loves scandal, not holiness.** Three ways we act faithlessly and therefore could never measure up to the bar of God's holiness.

Verse 28, ***"But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** Again, Jesus is speaking to a group of people like us. People who looked at the law and said, "Well, I've never done that. I've never committed the action of adultery. Therefore, I'm good." Jesus says, "Ok. But let's look at the heart. Let's talk about your heart's desires. Have you ever desired someone who is not your spouse in an improper way?"

You say, "Well, what's an improper way?" Simply put: one that leads to sin. One that violates covenant. One that reduces/devalues a human being to an object. One that replaces faithfulness to God as your first love. One that gives you a divided heart. One that tempts you to divide your allegiance or compromise your oath.

Jesus says, "Make no room for that. Cut it off!" ***"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away...And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell."*** – Matt. 5:29-30.

Listen, Jesus isn't teaching some doctrine of self-mutilation. That isn't his point. But he is serious about what he is saying. His point is that God's standard is inward purity. And the consequences of our sin is so devastating, before God, that it is better for us to endure loss if that thing is going to keep us from the Lord. The wages of our sin is death, eternal separation from God. Despite what people might tell us, we read in scripture that hell is a very real place. And despite what culture might tell us, there won't be any partying going on there.

As I was writing this sermon, I was reminded of the AC/DC song *Highway to Hell*. A song that led to that album going 7x platinum in the US alone. Listen to these lyrics:

Livin' easy
Lovin' free
Season ticket on a one way ride
Askin' nothin'
Leave me be
Takin' everythin' in my stride
Don't need reason
Don't need rhyme
Ain't nothin' that I'd rather do
Goin' down
Party time
My friends are gonna be there too
I'm on the highway to hell

This song should cause incredible grief in the heart of the Christian. Jesus is telling us that hell is not a place that we want to go. It is not a place of partying. It's a place of suffering.

Sin has devastating consequences. He is warning, "Cut it out of your life. It doesn't lead to life. It doesn't lead to flourishing. It doesn't lead to happiness." When God says, "Don't do something." What he is saying is "Don't get hurt!"

I want us to see this word: **It's translated in verse 29 and 30 "Causes to sin." It's the word: skandalidzo.** It's a word that carries in it a picture of a bait-stick in a trap that, when sprung, closes the trap and captures the animal.

Becky and I have been watching through the TV series *Alone*. You ever see it? If you don't know what I'm talking about, *Alone* is a show where 10 people are dropped in the middle of nowhere with 10 items and a camera and they have to survive in a hostile environment longer than everyone else.

To do that, they need food, and, often, someone will set a trap for an animal. And in the trap will be a hair trigger, so that when the animal comes to get the bait. Game over. That's this word – Skandalidzo. It's where we get our word scandal from. The bait in the trap. Sin that in turn causes bondage and devastation in our lives.

Here's the point: **Jesus is exposing that the human heart loves scandal, not holiness.** To achieve righteousness before God, what we really need, our only real solution, is a new heart. We need an alternative righteousness. We need Jesus.

Lustful attitudes expose our scandalous heart. Do we measure up? Remember, it's game film. Are we faithful in all things as God is or do our hearts betray us? From here Jesus brings it back to the marriage covenant with the real issue behind divorce.

Verse 31, ***"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."*** – Matt. 5:31-32

Now again, for those living “in Christ,” you are living under grace. Divorce is not an unpardonable sin, adultery is not something that can’t be forgiven. If you have been divorced or remarried it does not mean that you can never again have a relationship with God. In Christ, we can thank God that our identity is not based in what we do, but in who we are in Him. That said, this is game film. Jesus is telling us, giving us, a picture of a life that honors the Lord.

God still says under grace, **“Be holy as I am holy.”** Grace does not lower the bar, it set us free from the bar. But in that freedom as followers of Christ, if he is our Lord and Savior and our heart’s true desire, we want to live in a way that honors him, a life that worships the Father. And in that Jesus is showing us: **Divorce is not what God intends for his people.** As God is faithful in his covenant to us, so we are called to faithfulness in our covenants with one another. That’s God’s heart, that we would be faithful, that we would work it out, put in the effort, seek reconciliation, stay loving, go after health, continue in humility and service. That’s God’s heart - that we would be a people that are faithful to our word.

Talking about divorce, C.S. Lewis says it this way, **“Why add perjury to infidelity?”** He says, **“But one fault is not mended by adding another; unchastity is not improved by adding perjury.”**

In Jesus’ time a husband could divorce his wife for any reason by giving her a certificate of divorce in the presence of two witnesses. That’s what the letter of the law said. That might sound like God is ok-ing divorce, but that wasn’t the heart behind the law when it was given in the OT. The process of needing to spend the time writing out a certificate of divorce and needing to bring other people into the process was intended to protect the marriage. It was meant to slow the process down. To protect from hasty decisions. To provide outside counsel. “Don’t be an idiot. Don’t you understand the implications of what you are doing. Remember that God hates divorce. Remember your vows. This can be worked out.” That was the heart of the law.

That thinking was being perverted in Jesus day, much like it is today, to say, “At any time, for any reason, if it’s not working for you, if you don’t like, if you don’t want to do it anymore, just get out. Marriage isn’t a big deal. Your vows aren’t a big deal. Just cut the cord and move on.” God says, “Scandal.” Listen: **Divorce-oriented attitudes expose our scandalous hearts.**

That why I tell all of my premarital couples, “Take divorce right out of your vocabulary.”

Why? Because that heart attitude does not mirror the covenant purity and faithfulness of the Lord. It falls short.

And in that, Jesus finally transitions to talking about our oaths. **“Again you have heard it said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven for it is the throne of God, or by earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”** – Matt. 5:33-37

At first glance we might think that Jesus is saying, “Don’t take oaths.” He actually doesn’t say that. He doesn’t say, “Don’t swear.” He says, “Don’t swear falsely.”

He doesn’t say “Don’t take an oath at all.” He says, “don’t take an oath at all by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem or by your own head.”

It’s not wrong to take an oath. Jesus let the high priest put him under an oath. Paul called on God to be his witness. What is the marriage vow, but an oath we speak to one another? The issue here is not about taking an oath, it’s about being an honorable person who is trustworthy and faithful in your word.

Jesus’ 3rd point here is this: **the need to add weight to our oaths expose our scandalous heart.**

I love this quote by NT scholar Dr. William Mounce. He says, **“What the followers of Christ are to do is simply answer Yes and No and stand by their word...To be under the rule of God is to be absolutely trustworthy and transparently honest. To depart from this is to fall under the influence of the evil one.”** – Mounce, p. 48

How's your heart, church? Is there scandal? What the game film revealing?

As we ready our hearts for communion, we can only look to Jesus. We need an alternative righteousness. Jesus is our example of perfect faithfulness.

John 13:1 says, **“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”** So faithful is the love of God for us, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Jesus said, “No one takes my life from me, I choose to lay it down of my own accord.” Jesus knew our need for an alternative righteousness. He understood that no matter how good we are, we would always be guilty of sin. So he said, “I’ll take their place.” That’s the significance of Christ’s death on the cross. A righteous sacrifice had to die, his shed blood as payment for sin, so that a just exchange could take place. His righteousness for our sin. His life for our death. That is what is found in a relationship with him. Do you believe it? Do you accept it? Christian, you are not your own, you have been bought at a price – the price of his broken body, the price of his shed blood, because of that you live. Therefore, honor the Lord with your body. He calls all who are his to join him at his table, to live faithful to him as he lives faithful to us.

I invite you this morning to come forward and receive the elements and then we will all partake together.
(Pray)



RAISING

THE BAR

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

- Matt. 5:3



“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

- Matthew 5:20



“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’”

- Matt. 5:27

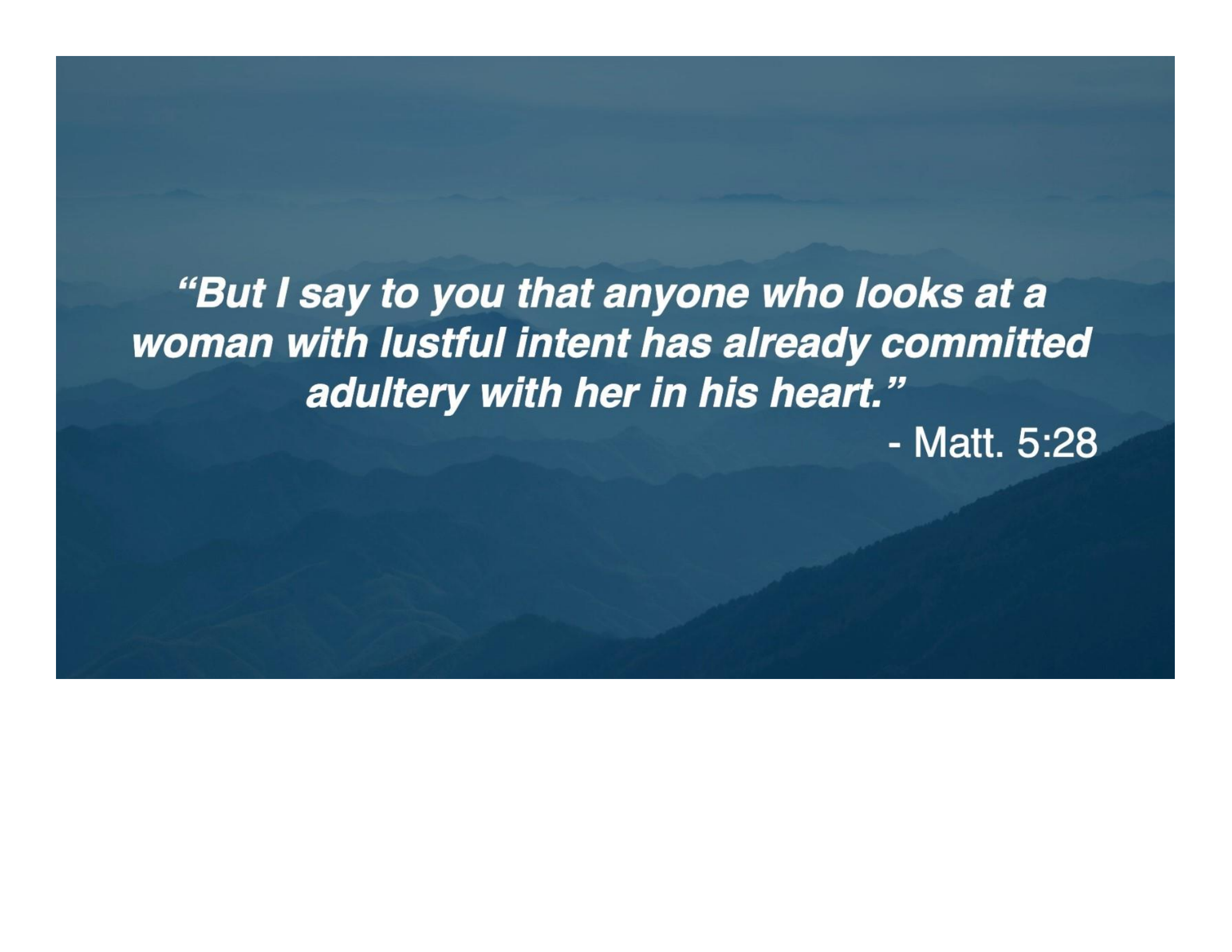


Jesus is about to expose that there are many more ways that we act faithlessly.

The human heart loves scandal, not holiness.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away...And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.”

– Matt. 5:29-30



“But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

- Matt. 5:28

The background of the slide is a photograph of a mountain range, likely the Blue Ridge Mountains, with a blue gradient overlay. The mountains are layered, creating a sense of depth. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

Jesus is exposing that the human heart loves scandal, not holiness.

“If your right eye (skandalidzo), tear it out and throw it away...And if your right hand (skandalidzo), cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.”

– Matt. 5:29-30


“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

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1) Lustful attitudes expose our scandalous heart.

The background of the slide is a photograph of a mountain range, with the peaks and ridges receding into the distance. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent blue gradient that is darker at the bottom and lighter at the top. Centered over this background is the text:

***Divorce is not what God intends
for his people.***



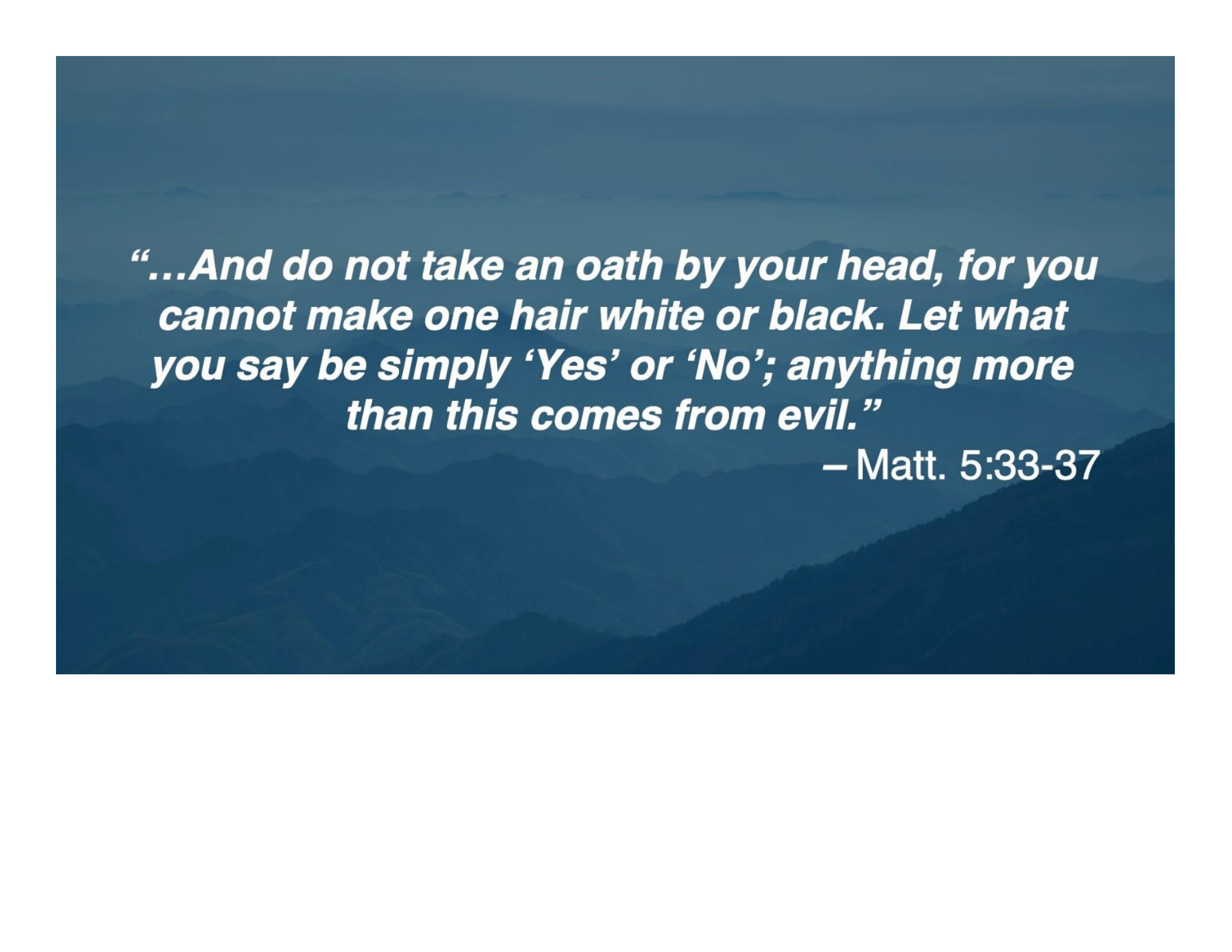
***“But one fault is not mended by adding another;
unchastity is not improved by adding perjury.”***

- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Jesus is exposing that the human heart loves scandal, not holiness.

- 1) Lustful attitudes expose our scandalous heart.**
- 2) Divorce-oriented attitudes expose our scandalous heart.**

***“Again you have heard it said to those of old,
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the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you,
Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven for it
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great King...”***



“...And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

– Matt. 5:33-37

Jesus is exposing that the human heart loves scandal, not holiness.

- 1) Lustful attitudes expose our scandalous heart.**
- 2) Divorce-oriented attitudes expose our scandalous heart.**
- 3) The need to add weight to our oaths expose our scandalous heart.**

What the followers of Christ are to do is simply answer Yes and No and stand by their word... To be under the rule of God is to be absolutely trustworthy and transparently honest. To depart from this is to fall under the influence of the evil one.”

– Dr. William Mounce