As Jesus develops His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, He focuses attention on the true interpretation of the Old Testament Law. The impact of what God commanded in the Old Testament goes beyond a person’s mere physical activity and is intended to deal with the condition of the heart. Proper physical activities should flow out of a changed heart. Those who went through the motions of proper physical activity without a changed heart were doing nothing acceptable before God.

The tendency of religion is to degenerate into external patterns and forms without affecting the internal. That is true in many of our great denominations. They started out committed to the Word of God, but their churches have, with the passing of time, become empty shells where people go through the routines and rituals of formalized worship devoid of any true relationship with God. When that happens, people’s lives are not transformed through faith in Jesus Christ. The point that Jesus is making in this passage is to show that it is impossible to have a life pleasing to God unless you have been changed by faith in Him.

Jesus is expressing His concern in this passage for the condition of the heart. The conclusion from the last study is that it is possible to have a murderer’s heart even though you may not have committed murder. God is going to judge us on the basis of our heart’s condition, not just on the basis of our external activities. In this study, Jesus is focusing attention on the fact that it is possible to have an adulterer’s heart without having committed adultery. One can be guilty of adultery before God even though he may have met the legal qualifications and guidelines set down for divorce and remarriage. Verses 27 through 32 of Matthew 5 revolve around the issue of adultery. The first point of the passage is that adultery can be committed in the heart. Jesus also makes the point that physical adultery can be committed. The thing that binds the whole section together is the subject of adultery.

1. Adultery in the Heart
Jesus begins in verse 27, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” He is quoting the seventh commandment from Exodus 20:14. After stating the commandment, Jesus continues, “but I say to you,” emphasizing the authority Jesus possesses over the true interpretation of the Law as given by God.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day had restricted the meaning of the commandment. They taught that as long as you have avoided the physical act of adultery, you have obeyed the commandment. But Jesus went on to tell them that adultery can be committed in the heart without the physical act ever occurring. Jesus said, “but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). The important thing before God is the condition of the heart, and that will form the basis for God’s judgment of people.

In this passage, Jesus is interpreting the seventh commandment, found in Exodus 20:14, in light of the tenth commandment. The tenth commandment as given by Moses is, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Ex. 20:17). This command regarding covetousness helps us understand what is involved in committing the sin of adultery -- coveting your neighbor’s wife.

Jesus said that if anyone looks on a woman with lust for her, he has committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 15:19 is similar to this statement and will help with understanding its meaning; “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.” This verse indicates that adultery, among other things, comes out of the heart. Jesus is backing up from the act of adultery to its source. Adultery has its roots in the heart.

Jesus is not saying you are guilty if you find a person of the opposite sex to be attractive. God has given us a normal attraction to and appreciation for the opposite sex. The construction of this passage makes it clear that He is not referring to this normal attraction. If a girl walks by and you say, “My, that is a pretty girl.” it does not necessarily mean you are guilty of adultery. Neither does the comment from the opposite sex, “My, that is a handsome man!” indicate adultery. It depends on what you do with that thought in the mind. What is the purpose in your looking and what do you do after you look?

The lust mentioned in Matthew 5:28 is in a grammatical construction which indicates purpose. When a man looks at a woman for the purpose of lusting in order to carry out the desires of the mind and of the heart and proceeds with the act of adultery in the mind, that makes him guilty before God of adultery in the heart. If a man looks on a woman with lust and begins to desire her, he contemplates the act of adultery and begins to look for the opportunity to carry out the desires of his mind. Then with the proper time and preparation, adultery is eventually carried out. But where did that adultery begin? In his heart.

If you look at a woman with the purpose of carrying out adultery in your mind, going through the act and savoring the delight of that relationship in your heart, you have an adulterer’s heart. You
may not have found the right occasion or you may be afraid of the consequences to carry out the physical act, but the condition of your heart is the same as one who commits the act. Everyone who ends up in an adulterous relationship began that relationship with the condition of the heart. As you lust for an individual, it is normal to look for the opportunity for the contact to develop into a relationship in order to provide the occasion for that act. The physical act of adultery is merely the culmination of what has been going on in the heart. Jesus indicates that God is going to judge us on the basis of our hearts. The one who lusts in his heart is no different from the one who commits the act of adultery.

Before your mind gets carried away with this point and moves to what seems to be the next logical conclusion, let me give you a word of caution. Do not conclude that since you have committed adultery in your heart, you might just as well go ahead and have the fun of the activity as well. Some people think it does not seem right to be judged guilty as an adulterer without actually enjoying the adulterous relationship. Just keep in mind that there are added consequences with each step of sin. If you follow through and carry out the act of adultery, that will bring further consequences and complications into your life. It is not as though there is not a difference between committing adultery in your heart and committing the act of adultery. The condition of the heart is the same, and God will judge you on the condition of your heart. But the consequences which the act brings into your life will become more severe.

James says in his epistle that the problem begins with lust in the heart. “Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (James 1:15,16). Sin is a result of the lust of the heart being incubated until it has the opportunity to come forth in an act of sin. This passage tells us that sin culminates in death. Sin always leads to destruction and ruin.

David, the godly king of Israel, looked off his roof and saw Bathsheba taking a bath. He lusted for her, then proceeded to carry out the act of adultery. That act greatly complicated his life. That is not to say that the lust of the heart is not serious. Lust is a very serious offense before God. But when David proceeded further in the lust and carried out the sinful intention, it greatly complicated David’s life. His family life from that point on was a tragedy because of sinful conduct. It began with the lust of the heart.

2. Stern Measures Established

Very severe and stern measures are laid down to deal with this problem. “And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matt. 5:29,30). There have been some gruesome illustrations of people carrying this out literally. Some time ago, I read in the newspaper about a man who was found walking along the highway carrying his hand which he had severed. He had read this verse in the Bible and decided to follow through with it. That is grotesque!
All you have to do is read the context and determine that this is not what Jesus is literally commanding. Taking out your right eye or cutting off your right hand will not change the condition of your heart. Jesus has already given instruction about that. The real problem is within, and cutting off a part of your body will not change the inside. Though we take the Bible literally, that is not the intent here. The problem is not the hand or the eye. The problem is that lust which is conceived in the heart results in sin. The point of the command is that you must be willing to take drastic action to deal with sin and its causes.

The word translated “stumble” in verses 29 and 30 is the Greek word skandalizo. It is carried over to English in the words “scandalize” or “scandal.” It originally meant the bait stick in a trap where bait was put in order to lure an animal and, thus, trap him. It also described the stick that was used to prop open the trap door and then release the door when triggered by the animal’s entrance. The word eventually came to mean a snare, a temptation to sin or an enticement. The verb form means to lure into sin or to lure astray. You must learn to deal drastically with that which lures you or entices you to sin. You cannot dally in it, flirt with it or fool around with it. You must be willing to take whatever drastic measures are necessary to deal with sin.

Note the personal responsibility that falls on the individual. If your right eye offends you, pluck it out. If your right hand offends you, cut it off. You are responsible to deal with the sin in your life and the enticement you face to sin. We always want to blame someone else, but God holds us personally accountable to Him for our sins. It is the individual who is ultimately responsible for his sins.

Jesus said it was better for you that one part of your body perishes than for your whole body to be cast into hell. There is no room in Scripture for people who are not accountable for their sins. We are never passive in our sin; we are always guilty parties. Sometimes the idea is presented today that a person cannot help his sin and, therefore, he is not accountable for it. Some take this approach with immorality, drunkenness and many other sins, as though the person were not accountable for his actions. This has made a mess of our whole judicial system as debates go back and forth about whether or not a person is really accountable for his actions. The Scripture is very clear that we are personally accountable to deal with our sin and our enticement to it. That is where the real problem comes in. If we would deal more effectively with the enticement to sin, we would not fall into sin nearly so much.

There is pleasure in sin. Because we are sinful beings, we have an attraction to sin. The pleasure of sin is of short duration, but it is very real. Our bodies enjoy certain sins. I am always willing to deal with the sins that your body enjoys, but I must also be willing to deal with the sins that my body enjoys. Some sins appeal to me and give me great pleasure. The sins which have appeal vary from one individual to another. I may be able to sit down at a table with a bottle of whiskey and not be affected by it at all. As far as I am concerned, that bottle may as well be a lamp. I do not have any great desire to drink it. The stink is terrible. But others may sit down there and not be able to resist it. They may even start to shake. They must deal with it accordingly. However, there are other sins that my body begins to crave. I have to deal with those issues that affect me.

Dealing with sin becomes a personal matter. Notice how Paul dealt with sin in 1 Corinthians...
9:27: “But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” Paul does not want to be found unworthy and, thus, disqualified for the prize. He has in view his rewards for service to Christ. To buffet the body is an expression that originally meant to beat around the eyes with the fist until the eyes swell up and turn black and blue. Paul is saying that he beats his body black and blue and makes it his slave in order to bring it into subjection. He had battles in his life - struggles and temptations. His body often wanted to do what it should not do. Yet he dealt with it severely and drastically. He did not beat his body black and blue literally, but the expression refers to the discipline necessary in order to deal effectively with sin and its enticement.

3. Don’t Provide for Sin

Paul spoke of the kind of behavior we should display as well as the kind we should not display in Romans 13:13: “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.” The solution to sinful activity is found in the next verse: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (v. 14). If we are not putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and manifesting His character, we are making opportunity for the flesh. That becomes a sin as we provide an occasion for further sin.

There is a candy jar on the coffee table in my office. This week someone visiting in my office saw the hard candy in the jar and commented, “Oh, I thought you would have jelly beans in there.” In the past I did keep jelly beans in it. I used to fill that jar with jelly beans every day because it was the gracious thing to do. When people would come in, I would say, “Have some jelly beans.”

The problem with that jar of jelly beans was that I would fill up the jar in the morning, then sit down at my desk and look at the jar of jelly beans. Then I would get up from my desk and walk over to the coffee table. By the time I left in the evening, the jar was empty. The next day, I would just have to fill up the jar with jelly beans again.

Do you know who the jelly beans were for? Me! I was not fooling anyone. I was making provision for myself. That is what we do in the more serious areas of our lives. We provide the opportunity for sin.

Just in case I want to give in, I sometimes tell Marilyn not to have any snack or junk food around the house. I usually tell her that in the morning just after breakfast. Then when I am sitting around in the evening, do you know what I ask? “Why aren’t there any snacks in this house? Don’t you ever get anything that we can just nibble on?” I want to make provision for what I really want.

Another example of making provision for the flesh is a person who has a problem with alcohol who drives home by his favorite bar every day. He does not plan to stop, but it is simply the best way home. It is nice to know the opportunity is there in case he decides to stop. We do the same thing in other areas of sin as well. We build in the opportunity because we know what it is like
to have the craving for sin without having made the opportunity to fulfill it. So we provide the occasion so that when the desire becomes intense enough, then we have the opportunity to indulge.

Another example is the person who wants to give up smoking and who puts a pack of cigarettes in the cupboard just to show his willpower. He is not really trying to build his willpower. He is having something available in case he wakes up in the middle of the night and needs a smoke.

We must be willing to deal drastically with our enticement to sin. Sometimes such drastic action is painful. It is a painful thing to cut off your right hand! But we must remove those enticements and allurements from our lives. Sometimes they are difficult to remove because we have come to like them.

Perhaps you have a job which pressures you in the area of moral choices. “I just cannot handle it,” you say. “But I need the job.” Maybe you are going to have to change jobs. “But jobs are not easy to come by,” you say. No, but that is better than ruining lives. You must be willing to take whatever drastic action is necessary to deal with that which is a stumbling block in your life.

The solution is not difficult. The carrying out of the solution is what is so hard. We have to be honest with ourselves so we do not cloud the issue and fool ourselves into playing games. For example, think of the jelly beans on my coffee table. When I fill that jar with jelly beans, I am not fooling anyone. Those jelly beans are for nobody but me! They are there for me when I want to eat them. I may say I am on a diet and want to lose weight, but what I really want to do is to have jelly beans when I want them. We may say we no longer want to commit our sins and we want God to help us. We may even say we are praying about it every day. But just in case He does not come through, we are going to provide the opportunity for the sin.

With such provisions, we are not fooling anyone, especially God. So we must take severe and drastic measures to eliminate the opportunities for sin which we are holding on to. We must do whatever is necessary to remove the occasion for sin.

4. Adultery in Deed

In this context Jesus moves into the subject of divorce and remarriage. It almost seems like a total change of subject, but it is not. Because of the lust of the heart, there is often a breakdown of the marriage relationship. You may find someone other than your marriage partner whom you like better. So the context is still adultery. The subject now is not only adultery in the heart, but adultery in the act affecting the marriage relationship.

Jesus begins by quoting again from the Old Testament as He discusses divorce and remarriage. “And it was said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal!’” (Matt. 5:31). That is a strong statement which Jesus elaborates on in Matthew 19. The Jews had taken an Old Testament instruction regarding divorce and remarriage and used that to provide the occasion for divorce for a variety of reasons.
Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1-4: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.” The point of the instruction is that whenever divorce and remarriage occur, you can never, ever, under any circumstances, return to the former mate. Even if your present spouse dies, you are not free to go back to the previous spouse. Never, under any circumstances, can there be a remarriage with the former partner once you have married another. There is no misunderstanding on that point from Deuteronomy 24. Such action is an abomination before the Lord. Some scholars suggest that the reason for this prohibition is because to go back to a former spouse after having been married to someone else becomes a form of incest. They see this as constituting incest because the family relationship that was established at the first marriage still continues.

The question that Jesus is addressing in Matthew 5:31,32 comes from the statement in Deuteronomy 24:1, “because he has found some indecency in her.” There were two schools of thought regarding the interpretation of this phrase -- the conservative and the liberal approach.

The liberals interpreted “indecency” very broadly to include anything the husband did not like about his wife. In fact, one rabbi wrote about a hundred years after Christ that it was acceptable to divorce your wife on the basis of this verse if you found somebody prettier. The liberal school had made this word broad enough to include everything -- no fault divorce.

The conservative school limited this word to immorality or adultery. They said the only thing encompassed in “indecency” is marital infidelity. This is the background behind Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5. Jesus’ interpretation of this question is continued more clearly in Matthew 19 when the question is raised again to Jesus.

Jesus indicates that the strict interpretation is the proper one. “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:32). Jesus is saying that if you divorce your wife for any reason except fornication, you are held responsible not only for your own adultery but for the adultery your former spouse may get involved in as well. If you divorce your wife for an unbiblical reason and she becomes involved in an adulterous relationship, God will hold you accountable for that. In essence, you have promoted adultery in that situation. That is a serious matter before God. Then Jesus goes on to say that anyone who marries a divorced person, except where fornication has occurred, is guilty of adultery.

5. God’s Design for Marriage

God’s intention in a marriage relationship is one woman and one man. Jesus refers in Matthew
19 to God’s intention in the marriage relationship as revealed in Genesis 2:24: “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” God’s instruction for a man to leave his father and mother was good advice. You can never have a good marriage until the man has left his father and mother and the parents have gotten their noses out of that new home. God knew what He was talking about.

One commentator said the word “cleave” (Gen. 2:24) is like glue. The husband is glued to his wife. It does not really matter what his father or mother says, what matters is what his wife says. He is glued to her, not to mommy and daddy. That is good for both the young people and the parents to know. Together they will have to make it or not make it.

God’s intention in marriage is one man and one woman. He started out by bringing Eve to Adam, and thus, He established the marriage relationship. Notice that God established it. That means man cannot break it. That is the point Jesus will arrive at, particularly in Matthew 19:6: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” If you want to break your relationship, you have to have one with a greater authority than God to break it.

Suppose that I owned my own company. One day I walked in saying, “This is what I want you to do, and this is how I want it done.” Then suppose someone who sweeps the floors walked in and said, “I think you ought to do it this way. This is my statement on the subject.” It does not really matter what he thinks about the subject. Only one with greater authority than the owner can change it. That is the way it is with God. He has joined two people together in marriage, and He has given instructions about the relationship. Even though a court may issue a piece of paper saying the marriage is broken, God does not see it that way. God says, “That paper is not binding on Me!” No one can overrule God. He established the marriage and joined the two together. For some man to assume he is going to undo it does not mean anything. That is why remarriage outside the grounds God stipulates is adultery.

6. God’s Attitude Toward Divorce

The issue of marriage and divorce really becomes a matter of authority. Who is in charge of this world, God or man? Man can rebel against God’s authority, but he cannot overrule it. God tells the Israelites in Malachi 2 why their worship is unacceptable to him: “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (v. 14). If you are married, you are bound before God in that relationship. The discussion continues in the next two verses: “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. ‘For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously’” (vs. 15,16).

Sometimes a distinction is made in this area that God does not make. Some people say that God hates sin but He loves the sinner. But notice what God says, “I hate divorce ... and him who
covers his garment with wrong” (v. 16). God hates not only the sin, divorce, but He also hates the one who is doing it, “him who covers his garment with wrong.” You cannot disassociate the sin from the sinner. The sin which God hates is an integral part of the sinner and what he is doing. God hates what he is doing as well as the one who does it. That is a strong statement. A paradox is involved here. God hates the sinner. God also loves the sinner. We will see this more clearly in the next study.

The Old Testament starts out in Genesis with God establishing marriage. It closes out in the Book of Malachi with God saying He hates divorce. Even though divorce is being practiced, God’s attitude toward it has not changed. From fifteen hundred years before the time of Christ when Moses wrote the Book of Genesis down to Malachi’s time, God has not changed His position. It is the same in spite of the fact that divorce and remarriage have become a common practice. The fact that divorce statistics are mushrooming today does not mean that God has changed His mind. His attitude toward divorce is the same.

Jesus is saying in Matthew 5 that in spite of the prevailing practice of divorce among the Greeks and Romans of His day, the issue is still adultery. When you divorce your wife, except for fornication, you cause her to commit adultery. And when you marry a divorced person, you commit adultery unless that person was divorced because of fornication. Jesus is referring to the husband divorcing his wife because, among the Jews, the wife could not divorce her husband. But the guilt is true for either side. In our society, it has become acceptable for divorce to be initiated by either party. However, God’s attitude toward divorce has not changed.

“Wait a minute,” you say. “I have a piece of paper that says I am divorced. It tells me I am free to remarry.” So what are you supposed to do? Are you going to give that paper to God and tell Him the janitor changed the rules? What kind of world is this?

People today say, “Well, that is what God said, but we decided it did not work, so we changed the rules.” That is exactly what they had done in Jesus’ day. The prevailing opinion in His day was that divorce had become acceptable. But Jesus is saying, “Let me tell you how it is before God. The issue is adultery!” It is just that simple.

7. God’s Allowance for Divorce

The question of adultery revolves around the statement, “except for the cause of unchastity” (Matt. 4:32). The word which is translated “unchastity” (porneia) is fornication or immorality. In English it is carried over into words like pornography. The word porneia refers to sexual immorality of all kinds. Sometimes it includes adultery, sometimes it is put alongside adultery to include all kinds of sexual sins except adultery. So it is an all-inclusive word. It is used of incest, bestiality and homosexuality, as well as adultery. When Jesus says, “except for the cause of unchastity,” He is saying “except for sexual immorality.”

There is one occasion in this passage which provides for the possibility of divorce. That occasion is immorality. But it does not necessitate divorce. The classic example of this in Scripture is Hosea and his wife. God told Hosea to love a woman who was loved by her lovers.
After she committed adultery, God commanded Hosea to take her back and love her again as his wife. So immorality does not necessitate divorce. In fact, if immorality occurs and the one guilty of immorality repents and indicates a desire for change, it is the biblical, Christian responsibility for the spouse to forgive the adulterer and trust God for the grace to make the relationship work. But provision is made that such sexual immorality would allow for the breaking of that relationship.

The word *porneia* is used in several passages in the New Testament. It is used in 1 Corinthians 5 in the context of incest, but it is not limited to incest as will be evidenced in other examples. Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth: “It is actually reported that there is immorality [*porneia*] among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife” (1 Cor 5:1). The Scriptures do not refer to the woman as his mother, so evidently she was his stepmother. They were involved in a sexual relationship of incest. It can also be described as unchastity or fornication. Paul continues in verse 11, “But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral [*pornos*] person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler - not even to eat with such a one.”

The word is also used in 1 Corinthians 6:13: “Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality [*porneia*], but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.” Paul is dealing with the Greek philosophy which said that just as you have to have food, so you have to have sex; just as you can eat food at lots of places, so you can have sex in lots of places. Paul continues his argument in verse 18: “Flee immorality [*porneia*]. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral [*porneia*] man sins against his own body.” Paul has already discussed the concept of immorality involved in making your body one with a harlot. A believer has become one with Jesus Christ. To take that which is one with Christ and make it one with a harlot is a blasphemous thought! But that is what happens when a believer indulges in immorality.

Galatians 5:19 indicates that immorality is one of the works of the flesh. “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality [*porneia*], impurity, sensuality.” Immorality in this context includes adultery of all kinds. It is my understanding that immorality and fornication provide the option for breaking the marriage relationship. It does not break the relationship, but it provides the opportunity for a formal divorce to occur which would free the person for remarriage.

What about a believer who has been divorced and remarried unbiblically? We are thankful that God picks us up where we are. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that you must break off such a marriage relationship. Whether your present marriage is your first or your fourth is not the issue. Your previous actions may have involved sin, but God picks you up where you are.

If you have previously been divorced unbiblically and have since remarried, when that marriage was consummated physically, you became one flesh. That was an adulterous act before God. But the former marriage is broken. There is no indication in Scripture that your present
relationship is a continual state of adultery. Regarding your past sinful act, you must recognize the fact that God has forgiven you. Then you should go on from here. Praise God for forgiveness. You are just as forgiven as anybody else for any other sin. There are no limitations in Scripture on that forgiveness.

Neither do I see in Scripture that a person who may have been divorced or remarried previously is not qualified to be a Sunday school teacher. When you are forgiven, you are forgiven. Praise God for His forgiveness. If you were formerly a drunk, praise God that you have been forgiven. The important thing now is that you do not continue that kind of life. If you were immoral, praise God that you have been forgiven.

A word of caution is in order lest you get yourself into a trap. Some people rationalize that since they are in a marriage they do not like, the best thing to do would be to go ahead and commit adultery, then they can have their new relationship with a new marriage. They conclude that God will forgive them, then they can go on with life. After all, that would surely be better than being stuck in this awful present relationship for the rest of their lives. Would it? God picks us up where we are, but when you sin intentionally, with a high hand as stated in the Old Testament, there are serious consequences. Do not think that you can put God in a box like that. The only person you can fool is yourself.

When thinking of such circumstances, we only need to remember David being confronted by Nathan after his sin with Bathsheba. Nathan told David after his repentance that God had put away his sin from him and forgiven him. Then Nathan proceeded to outline the consequences that David would experience as a result of his sin. David was told that the baby would die and the sword would never depart from his house. One of David’s daughters was later raped by one of his sons. That son was ultimately murdered for revenge. Then another son was eventually executed as he rebelled against David and tried to kill his own father. These were consequences God said David would suffer as a result of his sin. Therefore, we need to be very careful about sinning intentionally. Don’t think you can get away with it just because God will forgive you. He will forgive you, but He will not necessarily remove the consequences of your sin. As an example, an alcoholic can drink until he destroys his liver. God will forgive him and cleanse him from his sin, but He will not give him a new liver. Sin brings about its own consequences.

You need not be worried about yesterday’s sins, because you can do nothing about them. You cannot undo them, but, praise God, they are forgiven. You can have just as close a relationship with God as anyone else can have. You are just as fit to honor and glorify Him as anyone. But be careful that you do not use forgiveness and grace as an excuse to dabble in sin, because the consequences and chastening can be very severe and stunning.

8. The Heart is the Issue

Jesus is saying in Matthew 5 that the issue has to be dealt with in the heart, because that is the basis of the whole issue. God looks at the heart. If you have an adulterer’s heart, God is aware of that. He knows the thoughts of your heart. You must deal with those thoughts of adultery in your heart, because those thoughts will eventually lead you to begin looking for someone else.
That involves a lack of commitment to your partner and will eventually lead to the breakdown of the marriage relationship.

Believers need to realize that God joins them together permanently in marriage so that they are bound in that relationship by God and they need to look to Him for the strength and wisdom to make that relationship all He intends it to be. Ephesians 5 indicates that the purpose of this marriage relationship is to reveal the relationship Jesus Christ has with His Church. We need to make sure that our marriages do that.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." The tragedy today is not that there is divorce and remarriage in the world because that is to be expected in the world. Unbelievers are in a state of rebellion against God. But the tragedy is that this attitude has infected and infiltrated the church. Some believers have rejected God’s standards and are following the pattern of the world. Believers need to realize that God’s Word on the issue is unchanged. If we fail to follow God’s instructions, ruined lives are still the result. What a tragedy! We are privileged to be a people who reflect the relationship God has with His people in the relationships we have as husband and wife.