

FLIPPED

"THE FLIPSIDE OF UNFAITHFULNESS" MATTHEW 5:31-37

This Week's Core Competency

Faithfulness – I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to that relationship. Proverbs 3:3, 4

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.*

*4 Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.*

Faithfulness is a mark of spiritual maturity; no wonder it's one of the character qualities demanded in an elder and, by extension, in other Christian leaders, as well. The term does not appear in the list of requirements that Paul gave to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 or in the list he gave to Titus in Titus 1:6-9, but the quality is implicit in both lists. According to both lists, the candidate must be a man who is faithful to his wife. Both lists use the same words to make this expectation explicit; he must be "the husband of but one wife" [lit. "a one-woman man"] (1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:6). While this phrase has been interpreted in a number of ways, it most likely means "not divorced" rather than "not having more than one wife at a time." Warren Wiersbe's comments on this requirement are typical of those who hold this view. "It means that a pastor must not be divorced and remarried. Paul was certainly not

Words depend on character, and oaths cannot compensate for poor character.

- Warren W. Wiersbe

referring to polygamy, since no church member, let alone a pastor, would be accepted if he had more than one wife. Nor is he referring to remarriage after the death of the wife; for why would a pastor be prohibited from marrying again, in the light of Genesis 2:18 and 1 Timothy 4:3? Certainly the members of the church who had lost mates could marry again; so why penalize the pastor?

"It's clear that a man's ability to manage his own marriage and home indicate ability to oversee a local church (1 Tim 3:4-5). A pastor who has been divorced opens himself and the church to criticism from outsiders [maybe not so much nowadays], and it is not likely that people with marital difficulties would consult a man who could not keep his own marriage together. I see no reason why dedicated Christians who have been divorced and remarried cannot serve in other offices in the church, but they are disqualified from being elders or deacons" ("1 Timothy," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:220). Clearly faithfulness to one's spouse is a mark of spiritual maturity.

According to both lists, the candidate must be a man who is faithful to his confession. To Timothy Paul said the candidate must be "above reproach" (1Ti 3:1), and to Titus he said that he must be "blameless" (Tit 1:6). The first term means literally something like "not to be taken hold upon," which means "his conduct should be of such a nature that no handle is given to anyone by which to injure his reputation" (Homer A. Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 125). In other words, he gives no one cause to pull him aside and take issue with something he has said or done. It doesn't mean he must be sinless; it

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simply means he must live a consistent Christian life. He must be faithful, someone with "a good reputation with outsiders" (v. 7). The second term means much the same thing; it means "unaccused," which implies he is "one who is not called in question or called to account" (219). His words and his works live up to his Christian confession.

Obviously, if faithfulness is truly a mark of spiritual maturity, it is rightfully to be expected in every believer, and not just those who desire to be elders and leaders.

For Discussion

Sermons on marriage, in general, leave Ralph and Claudia feeling uncomfortable, sometimes even guilty; they avoid listening to sermons on divorce and remarriage altogether. They would have skipped church Sunday, but they missed the previous week and didn't know their pastor was going to preach on Matthew 5:31, 32. Oh well. You see, Ralph was married to someone else before he married Claudia, and Claudia was married to someone else before she married Ralph. Both have children from their previous marriages, and they have one child together. Theirs is a "yours, mine, and ours" family. Ralph was divorced from his first wife before he became a Christian on account of irreconcilable differences. Claudia was divorced from her first husband after she became a Christian on account of his affair with a coworker. Got any advice for this couple?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Matthew 5:31-37

31 *"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

33 *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' 34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (NIV(c)1984)*

Cf., another translation

31 *"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 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.*

33 *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (ESV)*

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * In the margin next to v. 31 write, "See Dt 24:1."
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 32.
- * Bracket "except for marital unfaithfulness" in v. 32.
- * Circle "marital unfaithfulness" in v. 32.
- * Bracket "become an adulteress" in v. 32.

- * In the margin next to v. 33 write, "See Lev 19:12; Nu 30:2, Dt 23:21."
- * Circle "swear" in v. 34.
- * Box "for" indicating *reason* in vv. 34-36.
- * Underline v. 37a.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Read Dt 24:1-4. Identify the one command contained in this long passage.
2. What do you infer about divorce in general from the passage?
3. Do you see any relationship between Jesus' exception in Mt 5:32 and Dt 24:1? Explain.
4. Read Mt 19:3-9 (esp. v. 7). Explain how the Pharisees and others of Jesus' day had misread Moses.
5. In what way, shape, or form did Jesus' interpretation of Moses words (Mt 19:8, 9) correct theirs?
6. What makes you think Jesus' teaching on divorce applies to wives who divorce their husbands? (See 5:32; cf., 19:9)
7. What does verse 38 contain if it doesn't contain a direct quotation from the Old Testament?
8. Read Mt 23:16-22. Explain how the Pharisees and others of Jesus day had misread the Old Testament.
9. In what way, shape, or form did Jesus' reasons for not swearing "at all" correct their wrongheaded practice?
10. **Discussion:** Talk about any connection you see between Jesus' teaching on divorce and on oaths.

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Matthew 5:31-37 contains the third and the fourth of six "antitheses" found in the chapter—the one regarding divorce being the last in the first group of three, and the one regarding oaths being the first in the last group of three. The division of the six into two groups of three is marked by the repetition of the full introductory formula "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" that is found in verse 21.

When it comes to the issue of divorce and remarriage it's important to tread gently, albeit truthfully, for practically everyone is painfully aware of the heartbreak that inevitably comes with the dissolution of a marriage. As so many know from experience, "There is almost no unhappiness so poignant as the unhappiness of an unhappy marriage, and almost no tragedy so great as the degeneration of what God meant for love and fulfillment into a non-relationship of bitterness, discord and despair" (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, TBST, 92). Jesus' passing remarks on it amount to little more than a summary of his teaching on the issue. A fuller treatment is contained in 19:3-9, which records his answer to the question some Pharisees asked him in Judea. Here's the background to the story. A debate was being waged in Jesus' day between two rival rabbinic schools, the schools of Hillel and Shammai. "Rabbi Shammai took a rigorist line, and taught from Deuteronomy 24:1 that the sole ground for divorce was some grave matrimonial offence, something evidently 'unseemly' or 'indecent'. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, held a very lax view. If we can trust the Jewish historian Josephus, this was the common attitude, for he applied the Mosaic provision to a man who 'desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever'. Similarly Hillel, arguing that the ground for divorce was something 'unseemly', interpreted this term in the widest possible way to include a wife's most trivial offences. If she proved to be an incompetent cook and burnt her husband's food, or if he lost interest in her because of her plain looks and because he became enamored of some other more beautiful woman, these things were 'unseemly' and justified him in divorcing her. The Pharisees seem to have been attracted by Rabbi Hillel's laxity, which will explain

the form their question took: 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife *for any cause*.' In other words, they wanted to know whose side Jesus was on in the contemporary debate, and whether he belonged to the school of rigorism or of laxity" (Stott, 93).

The Pharisees were apparently preoccupied with the grounds for divorce. Make a rule with an exception and most people focus on the exception in an attempt to broaden or add to it, and the Pharisees were no different. Jesus, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the institution of marriage. His reply was really no answer at all. He declined to answer their question directly; instead, he took them back to Genesis to demonstrate that divorce had no place in God's original plan. "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," 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"? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate!" (vv.4-6).

When asked why Moses commanded a man divorce his wife and send her away, Jesus corrected their misreading of Dt 21:1-4. In the first place, he told them Moses did not command a man divorce his wife; he permitted it and that only because of the people's hard hearts (v. 8), implying that the provision was "only a divine concession to human weakness" (95). In the second place, he told them Moses' merely intended to prohibit remarriage to one's own previously divorced spouse, not to provide a myriad of grounds for divorce. Their error, like that of the Sadducees who questioned Jesus about resurrection, was based in their misunderstanding of Scripture (22:9). Jesus made it clear that the indecency to which Moses referred was limited to "marital unfaithfulness" (v. 9; cf., 5:32) not burning dinner. In the end, divorce for reasons other than "marital unfaithfulness" all lead to adultery.

When it comes to making and breaking oaths, the Pharisees and others of the day were looking for loopholes. "They argued that what the law was really prohibiting was not taking the name of the Lord *in vain*, but taking *the name of the Lord* in vain. 'False swearing', they concluded, meant

profanity (a profane use of the divine name), not perjury (a dishonest pledging of one's word). So they developed elaborate rules for the taking of vows. They listed which formulae were permissible, and they added that only those formulae which included the divine name made the vow binding. One need not be so particular, they said, about keeping vows in which the divine name had not been used" (100). Jesus condemns them for their sophistry in 23:16-22. And in 5:34 he tells his disciples, "Do not swear at all," and then goes on to explain that any

attempt to avoid alluding to God by swearing by heaven, earth, or Jerusalem is nonsense since all these belong to God. No use swearing by your own head, either, because God is in control of you not you. Just tell the truth. Anyone willing to break his word is likely also to break his oath as well. As one author rightly says, "Words depend on character and oaths cannot compensate for poor character" (Warren W. Wiersbe, "Matthew," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:24).

The Message of the Passage

Christ's disciples are faithful to their spouses and to their words, looking neither to dissolve their marriages nor obfuscate their speech.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“The Flipside of Unfaithfulness”

(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 31 *it has been said* "In the third antithesis, Jesus carries forward the thinking about the sanctity of marriage by alluding to the Mosaic pronouncement on certificates of divorce (Deut. 24:1; see also comments on 19:3-12). Since divorce was a widespread phenomenon in the ancient world, God instituted a regulation through Moses that was designed to do three things: (1) protect the sanctity of marriage from 'indecent' defiling the marital relationship; (2) protect the woman from a husband who might simply send her away without any cause; (3) document her status as a legitimately divorced woman so that she was not thought to be a harlot or a runaway adulteress" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 246). "This quotes Deut 24:1, the basic OT passage on divorce, and has two primary thrusts: the reason for legal divorce ('something indecent') and the demand for written papers that explain the reason and allow the spouse freedom to remarry. So the writ of divorce (see 1:19 for Joseph intending to give such to Mary) relinquished the husband's legal claim on the wife and gave her freedom to remarry. By Jewish law this could only be done by the husband, but the rabbis had developed ways an unhappy wife could apply pressure on the husband to grant her freedom" (Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT, 199, 200).

v. 31 *must give* Pharisees viewed both the divorce and the giving of a certificate as commands of Moses, but a closer look reveals that divorce is not commanded in Dt 24:1. "The whole paragraph hinges on a long series of conditional clauses. This may be brought out in the following paraphrase: 'After a man has married a wife, *if* he finds some indecency in her, and *if* he gives her a divorce-certificate and divorces her and she leaves, and *if* she marries again, and *if* her second husband gives her a divorce-certificate and divorces her, or *if* her second husband dies, *then* her first husband who divorced her is forbidden to remarry her . . .' The thrust of the passage is to prohibit the remarriage of one's own divorced partner . . . this prohibition is the only command in the whole passage; there is certainly no command to a husband to divorce his wife, nor even any encouragement to do so" (Stott, 95).

v. 32 *except* Although some have argued otherwise (refuted in Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33b, *Matthew* 14-28, 549; Thomas R. Edgar, "Divorce and Remarriage for Adultery and Desertion," in *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, 169, 70), "The natural way to take the 'except' clause is that divorce is wrong because it generates adultery except in the case of fornication. In that case, where sexual sin has already been committed, nothing is laid down, though it appears that divorce is then implicitly permitted, even if not mandated" (D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8: 153).

v. 32 *marital unfaithfulness* Cf., "sexual immorality" (ESV; NKJV); "immorality" (the NET Bible), "fornication" (KJV); "unfaithfulness" (TEV); "unchastity" (NRSV). On Mt 19:9 where the same phrase occurs, one author argues, "The term *porneia* has the meaning 'illicit sex' and can refer to illicit sex in general or, in a given context, to some specific immorality. The meaning in this context, therefore, is decisive for determining the nature of the exception. Matthew 19:9 is a discussion concerning the valid basis of divorce and states that some type of illicit sex on the part of the wife is the only proper basis for divorce. Therefore, the most natural way to interpret *porneia* is with the meaning 'adultery.' A less likely, but plausible, opinion is that *porneia* does not have a specific reference here but refers to any type of illicit sex, including incest, homosexuality and sodomy. However, in a context concerning husbands and wives, particularly when using the term *porneia* for the wife's conduct and *moichao* for the husband's, it is certain that the primary reference is to the sin of adultery" (Edgar, 162). "It seems, therefore, that we must agree with R. V. G. Tasker's conclusion that *porneia* is 'a comprehensive word, including adultery, fornication and unnatural vice'. At the same time we have no liberty to go to the opposite extreme and argue that *porneia* covers any and every offence which may be said in some vague sense to have a sexual basis. This would be virtually to equate *porneia* with 'incompatibility', and there is not etymological warrant for this. No, *porneia* means 'unchastity', some act of physical sexual immorality" (Stott, 97; see also Hagner, 124, 25; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* 1-7, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, 304-306).

v. 33 *it was said* "After the full introductory formula (cf. v. 21), the evangelist presents not a quotation from the OT, as in the first two antitheses, but a crystallization of the OT teaching on the subject (cf. Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 23:21-23; cf. Zech 8:17). The OT clearly emphasizes that oaths have a binding character" (Hagner, 127).

v. 37 *the evil one* Lit., "the evil," cf., "evil" (ESV). The same articular noun is translated "evil person" in v. 39. "And anything more than this, Jesus added, comes from evil, either from the evil of our hearts and its fundamental deceit, or from the evil one whom Jesus described as 'a liar and the father of lies'" (Stott, 101).

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

Old Faithful, the famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park, erupts approximately every 91 minutes. It has consistently been spraying a tower of water an average of 145 feet high since at least 1870 when it was first recorded in the journals of early explorers. Annually, many visitors flock to this national park to wait and watch for Old Faithful to erupt. It never disappoints. The God who created Old Faithful never disappoints either. The Hebrew writer tells us that He "is the same, yesterday and today and forever." (Heb. 13:8) It is He, "the Mighty One, God, the Lord (who) speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets" (Ps. 50:1). Psalm 113:3 declares, "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised." This is a great week to remind your kids that our God is faithful. Plan to get up early this week and catch a sunrise or plan an evening picnic at sunset. Use this time to remind your family that just as God is faithful, your family will be faithful to Him and each other. Making this commitment to your family will be affirming to little ones (and big ones) who want to know that your "yes" is "yes" and your "no" is "no".

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Matthew 5:33-37

1. According to this passage, who controls everything, even the hairs on our heads?
2. When Jesus said, "let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no', what was he saying?"

What Do You Think

1. What does it mean to be faithful?
2. What does it mean to be trustworthy?
3. Why is it important for God's children to be people who keep their word?

What R U Going To Do

Every time someone in your family answers "yes", he must say "yes, yes" and every time someone in your family answers "no", he must say "no, no". Chances are, someone will hear you and ask why you are responding like that. Tell them that your family is committing to being faithful and true to their words.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Faithfulness - Sticking with God, no matter what, makes me a winner

Memory Verse

Matthew 5:37, "All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.