

# Faithfulness in the Kingdom

Kingdom Living #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 4, 2025 - Matthew 5:31-37

**IT'S TIME UPDATE:** Good morning church! Before we begin our sermon today, I want to give you an update on our IT'S TIME generosity initiative. Remember our three goals:

- **BE STRONG:** We want to strengthen community engagement. We engaged a church social media company to help us reach more people with the gospel. We launched on Good Friday. Since then, we've had \_\_\_\_\_ contacts with people expressing interest in attending one of our two campuses. Many of our guests here today may have decided to attend because they heard about us on Facebook or some other app. More importantly, we've had real conversations with those who have responded to our increased online presence.
- **DO THE WORK:** We want to work to increase our ministry capacity. We've seen many more of you step up and answer the call to help with the growing needs we have in Guest Services (greeters, ushers, coffee shop...), Children's ministry (teachers, assistants...), and Community Groups (host homes, shepherds...). However, with the fast growth we're experiencing, we really need more help. Have you been waiting on an invitation to "do the work" of the ministry? Well, here it is: We need you!
- **BE FEARLESS:** We want to fearlessly lay a foundation for future growth by providing adequate space for our growing church. We've moved into our new home for our Rocky Mount campus and we've already experienced amazing growth! Indeed, if you haven't seen our new campus home yet, we're having our church picnic today at 3-7PM at our new location! We've been meeting in our new home since Easter Sunday, but next Sunday on Mother's Day, we're having our official GRAND OPENING! So be praying for this!



So that's our IT'S TIME update for May! God is moving in our church, so put your 'yes' on the table and be part of what God is doing. Because IT'S TIME to BE STRONG, DO THE WORK, and to BE FEARLESS for God!

**INTRO:** Now, let's continue our sermon series today entitled, KINGDOM LIVING. It's an expositional study of Christ's Sermon On the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. Many have described it as the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. It describes what life looks like in His kingdom—a kingdom that is radically different from the culture of this world.

Today, we'll be focusing on Matthew 5:31-37. We've titled this sermon: FAITHFULNESS IN THE KINGDOM because it addresses King Jesus' call to be faithful in keeping the marriage covenant and in our daily communication. Now I must confess a reluctance to preach this sermon. In fact, I'd say many pastors are tempted to skip this passage because it discusses the topic of divorce. And that makes it challenging to preach on, not only because it's a complex subject, but because it's so emotionally charged and so many have suffered and are still suffering from the pain and aftermath of divorce.

**Need:** Indeed, there are very few of us who have not been affected in some way by divorce. Either as the husband and wife who either would not or could not reconcile, to the children of divorce who had no choice in the matter, to the family and friends connected to the couple, who feel compelled to choose a side. Divorce affects everyone.

I experienced two tragedies in my early years. First, the death of my father when I was 8. Then, the pain of the failure of my mother's 2nd marriage when I was 11. It seemed she had only recently stopped crying from my father's death when the tears started to flow again over the deep and painful hurt of her 2nd husband's lies and unfaithfulness. After their marriage ended and she would be crying and feeling regret. I would try to comfort her by saying, "Mom, I know you're hurting, but we wouldn't have Donnie if you hadn't married again." She never married again. She made Jesus and her four children the focus of her life.

**Trans:** I've felt the tragedy of both death and divorce. I've grieved over both, yet I must say that the pain of divorce seems to linger longer. I think that's why the Bible says God hates divorce. So I'm going take courage and preach on this topic, praying it will either spare you this pain or help you get healing for the pain and grief you feel today.

**BODY:** In the gospel of Matthew 5:31-37, Jesus taught His disciples that true righteousness in the kingdom of heaven required a deeper faithfulness to the commitments they made than what was taught by the religious leaders of that day. As Kingdom citizens we are called to pursue faithfulness in all our commitments. How can we be faithful in our commitments? Jesus identified two areas where we are called to be faithful.

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**Read text:** Matthew 5:31-37 (ESV) <sup>31</sup> "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> "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.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

## CHRIST CALLS US TO BE FAITHFUL ...

### 1. ...To God's view of the marriage covenant.

**EXP:** (31-32) The 1st area of commitment is to the marriage covenant. As Kingdom citizens, we are to called to be faithful to God's view of the marriage covenant. What is God's view, His plan for marriage? Jesus tells us much by greatly limiting the grounds for divorce. Because the truth is God hates divorce!

Malachi 2:16 (NLT) "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.

Like many of you, I've felt the pain of both death and divorce. And while both bring grief, divorce leaves a lingering wound that affects hearts, homes, and generations. That's why the Bible says, 'God hates divorce.' Not because He hates the people involved, but because He loves them and hates what divorce does to them.

**"It was also said" (31)** - this is the 3rd of Jesus' 6 antitheses where He contrasts how the Pharisees were misinterpreting God's law concerning marriage and divorce with a true understanding of it.

**"Divorces" (31 - 4x)** (ἀπολύω, *apoluō*) - Lit., "to set loose," to let go, divorce.

**"Certificate" (31)** (ἀποστάσιον, *apostasion*) - divorce, repudiation, a bill of divorce. A legal document.

**"But I say" (32)** (ἐγὼ λέγω, *egō legō*) - emphatic use of "I" again. "I, I say." Jesus speaks with authority.

**"Except ... sexual immorality" (32)** (πορνεία, *porneia*) - illicit sex; adultery, fornication. Jesus interpreted Deut. 24:1 "because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce..."

**"Makes her commit adultery" (32; 2x)** (μοιχάω, *moichaō*) - unlawful intercourse with another's spouse, adultery. Jesus connects it to His earlier discussion of the 7th commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Divorce and remarriage "except on the ground of sexual immorality" is adultery. "Jesus says that divorce beyond this exception "causes her to commit adultery." Jesus is speaking about the wife with the implication that the woman will, of necessity, need a husband to survive. Because there were no biblical grounds for divorce, she is forced into an act of adultery" (Akin, *Sermon...*, p.67).

**"Marries a divorced woman" (32)** (γαμέω, *gameō*) - to marry. Same for the man as the woman. Divorce and remarriage without biblical grounds constitutes adultery.

**ARG:** **The Pharisees were interested in divorce, but Jesus cared about marriage.**

Matthew 19:3-9 (ESV) <sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

**ILL:** Two rival rabbinic schools during Jesus' day: The school 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 offense, something evidently 'unseemly' or 'indecent'. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, held a very lax view... [that a man could] 'be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever'" (Stott, *Sermon*, p.99).

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Yet Jesus moves the discussion to God's original intent before the Fall or the Law. He quotes Genesis, emphasizing that marriage is between one man and one woman for life. For they are "one flesh." And not only between man and woman, but a covenant with God. The Pharisees wanted to live in a "No Fault Divorce" state, but Jesus taught that marriage is more than a certificate or a contract. It's a covenant!

What's the difference between a contract and a covenant?

- A Contract is a legal, transactional agreement. It is valid as long as both parties meet conditions. It can be broken or nullified. In a lease agreement, if the renter stops paying, the landlord can end the contract.
- A Covenant is a sacred, relational commitment. It is based on trust, loyalty, and love, involving God as a witness or participant. It is intended to be permanent and unbreakable—"until death do us part." Both parties are to serve, sacrifice, and remain faithful, even if the other party fails. Marriage is a covenant—not just between two people, but between the couple and God

Malachi 2:14 (ESV) ... the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by **covenant**.

**APP:** Christ calls us as His Kingdom citizens to be faithful to God's view of the marriage covenant.

- If you're married: Stay faithful. Work through difficulty. Seek help when needed.
- If you're divorced: Seek God's grace and forgiveness. Examine your past in light of Scripture.
- If you're single: Prepare your heart to treat marriage as a covenant, not a contract.
- For all of us: Uphold marriage as sacred in how we speak and support others. Divorce is a concession not a command. It was allowed due to "hardness of heart." It was never God's desire for us.

## 2. ...To God's standard for truthful communication.

**EXP:** (33-37) Jesus moves from covenants to communication. The 2nd area of commitment is communication. You may have grown up saying things like "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye" in order to convince others of the truth of your words, but Jesus says such talk is evil, literally from the "evil one." Jesus calls us to faithful and truthful talk!

"**You have heard**" (33) - Jesus continues His formula by introducing the 4th of His 6 antitheses...

"**Swear falsely**" (33) (ἐπιορκέω, *epiorkeō*) - to swear falsely, commit perjury. Not a reference to a specific law, but of several such as: "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Commandment #9; Ex. 20:16) and laws concerning not breaking vows using the Lord's name as in:

Leviticus 19:12 (ESV) "You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."

"**Perform to the Lord**" (33) (ἀποδίδωμι, *apodidōmi*) - to deliver, discharge what is due.

"**Do not take an oath**" (34) (ὀμνύω, *omnyō*) - to swear with an oath. Better not to swear "at all." For the Pharisees had introduced complicated "oaths" to avoid using the Lord's name, thereby allowing for breaking them. Here are some examples, which Christ demolished by showing that each of them actually used God's name anyway:

"**By Heaven**" (34) (οὐρανός, *ouranos*) - the seat of order of things eternal and consummately perfect where God dwells and other heavenly beings. As Jesus says, the "throne of God."

"**By the Earth**" (35) (γῆ, *gē*) - arable land; the ground, the earth as a standing place. "**Footstool**" (35) (ὑποπόδιον, *hypopodion*) - a footstool; taken from the practice of conquerors who placed their feet on the necks of their conquered enemies. The earth is for God's feet.

"**By Jerusalem ... city of the great King**" (35) (βασιλεύς, *basileus*) - who is this great King? This is Zion, this is the city of the temple where God sits on the mercy seat.

"**By your head**" (36) (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) - the head. Equal to saying: "I swear on my life."

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“Yes or no” (37) (vai vai oũ oũ, *vai vai ou ou*) - Yes yes, no no. Simply this, your word should be yes or no and nothing more. Anything more is from evil as Jesus says.

**ARG:** As members of Christ’s body, as Kingdom citizens, we are called to put away falsehood.

Ephesians 4:25 (ESV) Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

**Speaking the “truth in love” we grow in becoming more like our King!**

Ephesians 4:15 (NLT) Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

**ILL:** Always read the “Fine Print.” A man bought a gym membership because of the big sign: “Only \$10 a month!” But after signing the contract, he learns about the annual maintenance fee, a six-month cancellation penalty, and extra charges for basic classes. He feels duped.

When we use “fine print” in our relationships, saying one thing but meaning another, we’re not living the truth. Jesus calls us to plain, honest speech: no hidden agendas, no half-truths, no verbal loopholes.

**APP:** Jesus is calling His disciples to such consistent truthfulness that oaths become unnecessary. In a culture where exaggeration, flattery, and half-truths are common, Jesus calls us to a higher standard—to speak plainly and truthfully, even when it’s costly.

- Let your “yes” truly mean yes and your “no” be clear and honest.
- Don’t say things like “I swear to God” to make your words seem more trustworthy. Live in such a way that your everyday speech earns people’s trust.
- This means telling the truth even when it hurts, following through on promises, owning your mistakes, and refusing to manipulate people.

**CONCLUSION:** Jesus’ words in this passage are not a call to stricter rules—they’re a call to deeper faithfulness. He isn’t merely telling us to avoid breaking our marriage vows or to stop swearing falsely. He’s calling us to be people of integrity, people whose hearts match their words and whose promises reflect the faithfulness of God Himself.

So what do we do when we look at our lives and see failure? When we recognize past broken promises, broken marriages, or words that didn’t reflect the truth?

We can look to Jesus, not only as our Lord, but as our Savior. His perfect faithfulness covers our unfaithfulness. His truthfulness redeems our lies. At the cross, He bore the weight of every broken vow and every dishonest word, and through His resurrection, He offers forgiveness, healing, and a new beginning.

By grace, we are not defined by our past failures, but by His perfect faithfulness. And by His Spirit, we are empowered to walk in newness of life, to honor our covenants and to speak with honesty, not out of fear, but out of love for the One who first loved us.

So today, if you need forgiveness, it’s available. If you need strength to be faithful in your marriage, truthful in your speech, or consistent in your character, come to Jesus. For all that we need is found in Him.

Let’s answer Christ’s call, not in our own strength, but in the power of His grace. Let us be a people whose yes means yes, whose no means no, and whose lives reflect the faithfulness of the Kingdom we belong to.

Let’s pray.