

A close-up photograph of a stone architectural detail, likely a frieze or cornice, featuring intricate carvings of acanthus leaves and scrolls. The stone is a warm, reddish-brown color. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

Tim Collins

<http://www.pas.Rochester.edu/~tim/study/study.html>

SERMON ON THE MOUNT:
Adultery and Divorce

Review from last meeting

- We are looking at the *antitheses*—“you have heard... but I tell you”
 - ❖ Why are they called “antitheses”, and how is this misleading?

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 - ❖ Not so much *antitheses* as *intensifications* of the Law of Moses
- First one: *murder*
 - ❖ You have heard: don't murder
 - ❖ But I say... (what?)

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 - ❖ Not so much *antitheses* as *intensifications* of the Law of Moses
- First one: *murder*
 - ❖ You have heard: don't murder
 - ❖ But I say, anyone who
 - ❖ Is angry is subject to judgment
 - ❖ Who says “raca” is answerable to the court
 - ❖ Who says “you fool” is in danger of the fires of hell

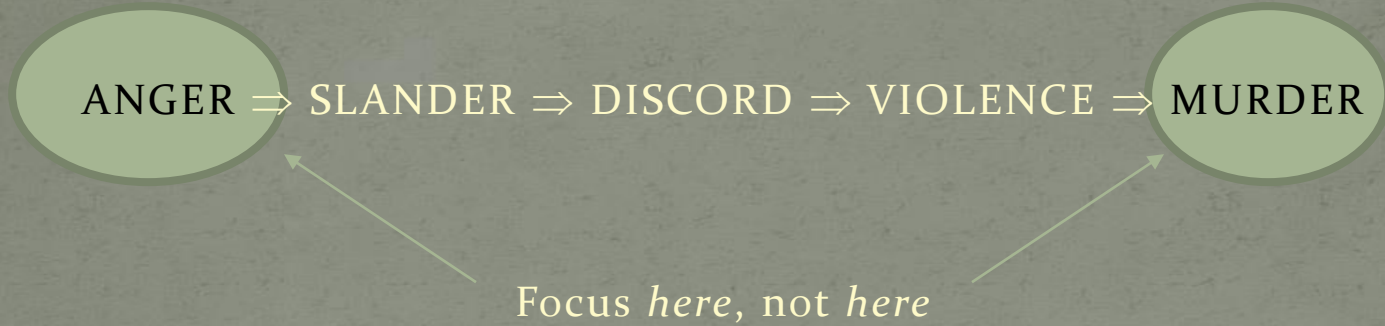
Review from last meeting

- First, note that not all anger is sinful (Jesus in the temple)
 - ❖ Detachment is not the goal (and Christianity is not Buddhism)



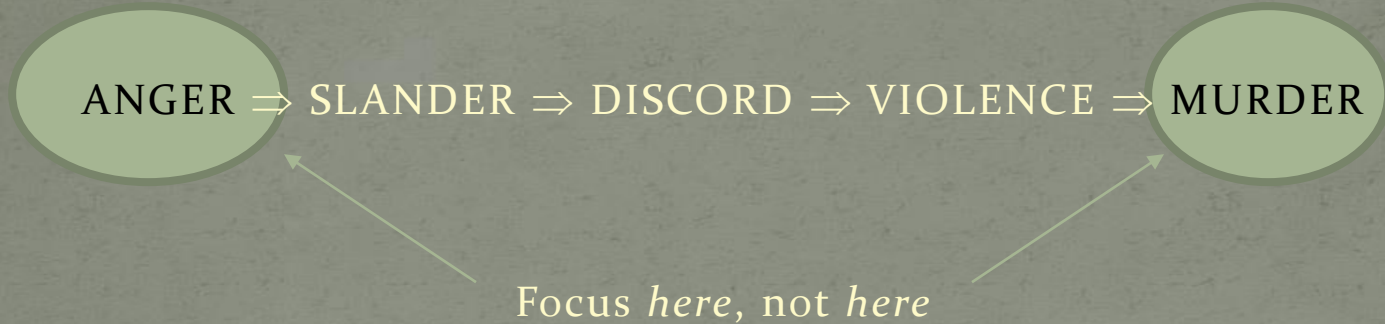
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- Second, Jesus' teaching:



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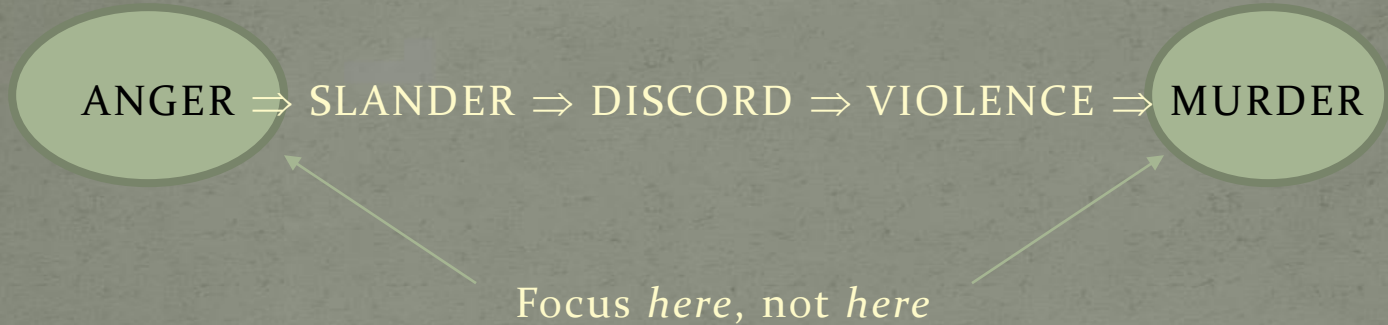
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- Jesus: Uproot the sin before it can grow!
- Quick quiz: which New Testament Epistle is a commentary on the SOTM?

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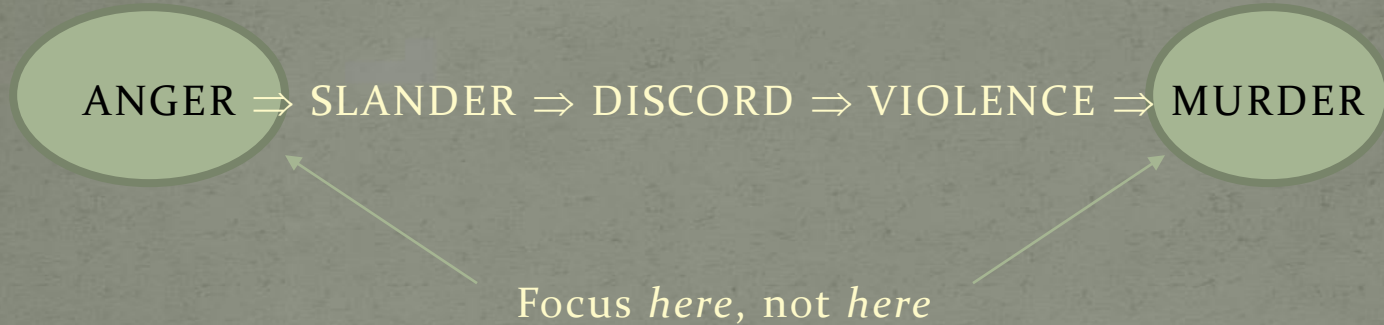
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- Quick quiz: which New Testament Epistle is a commentary on the SOTM?
- Answer: *James!*

Review from last meeting

- Second, Jesus' teaching:



- Jesus: Uproot the sin before it can grow!
- The epistle of James, *a commentary on the SOTM*, puts it this way:
 - ❖ “But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; 15 then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:15)

Not just *murder* but *anger* and *harsh words*

- Sages of Jesus' day tried to build a "fence around the law"
- The theory: if you try to obey the law you'll fail sometimes
 - ❖ So add *more* laws around it, and try to follow that *bigger* set and you'll be less likely to break the law itself
 - ❖ So: if you want to avoid becoming unclean, don't just follow the Torah; don't even *talk* to a Gentile and certainly don't walk through Samaria

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 - ❖ So: if you want to avoid becoming unclean, don't just follow the Torah; don't even *talk* to a Gentile and certainly don't walk through Samaria
- Jesus is raising the bar: not just *murder*, but *anger*

Q: Is Jesus also building a fence around the law?

This week: adultery and divorce

- 27 *“You have heard* that it was said, ‘You shall not commit **adultery.**’
28 *But I say to you* that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.
- 31 *“It was also said,* ‘Whoever **divorces** his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 *But I say to you* that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

“anyone who **looks** at a woman lustfully”

- The word “looks” is in the present tense
- In Greek, the present tense often has a sense of continuous action
- This verse probably refers “not to noticing a person’s beauty, but to imbibing it, meditating on it, seeking to possess it” [Keener]

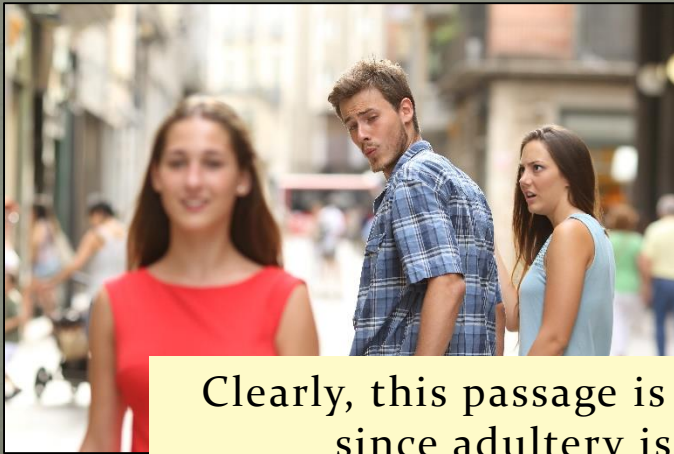
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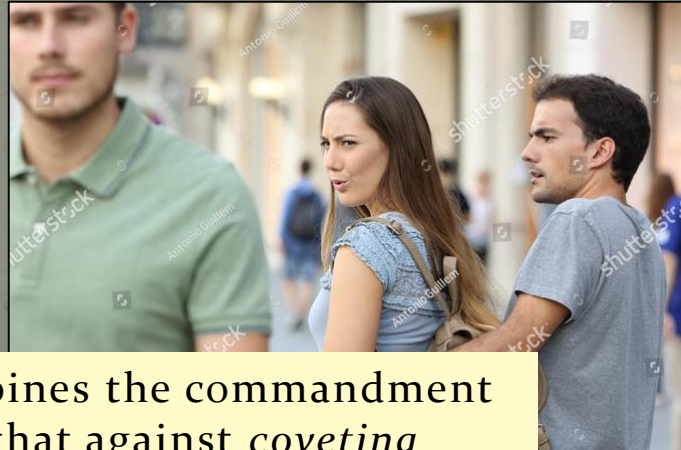
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Clearly, this passage is for both men and women,
since adultery is not gender specific

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In this passage Jesus combines the commandment against *adultery* with that against *coveting*

Ancients differed in their views of lust

- Some Mediterranean cultures saw lust as natural
 - ❖ Much like my French friend Jacques, who sees appreciation of the bodily form as natural and healthy
- Jewish writers weren't so sanguine about lust; e.g. Job:
 - ❖ "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how could I look upon a virgin?"
- Some Jewish writers also saw lust as equivalent to adultery
 - ❖ Testament of Isaachar 7:2: "Except my wife I have not known any woman. I never committed fornication by the uplifting of my eyes" (2nd cent. AD)
- In a culture where married women were expected to cover their heads to avoid provoking lust, Jesus puts responsibility squarely back on the viewer



Jesus' solution for *adultery* parallels that for *murder*

- What does Jesus teach?
- (...John Stott clip, below...)
- Has anyone here deliberately restricted activities, reading, movies, time with others, etc., to avoid sinning in this area?



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- What does Jesus teach?
- (...John Stott clip...)
- Has anyone here deliberately restricted activities, reading, movies, time with others, etc., to avoid sinning in this area?
- Pornography is, famously, at epidemic proportions
 - ❖ In Jesus' day, communities were small, lust was restricted to personal interactions
 - ❖ Now we *give* our children pornography machines (youtube, file sharing, etc.)



Addiction counseling focuses on impulse control

Symmetry Counseling

H.A.L.T.
HUNGRY? ANGRY? LONELY? TIRED?

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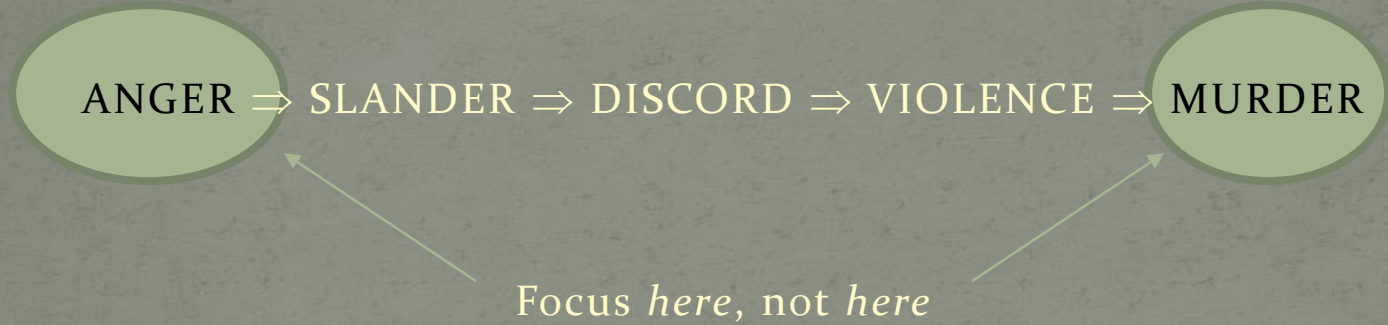
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Q: How can we use Jesus' teaching to tackle porn?

Review: anger, adultery

- The law forbids murder; Jesus teaches:



Review: anger, adultery

- The law forbids adultery; Jesus teaches:

LUST ⇒ DESIRE ⇒ OBSESSION ⇒ TEMPTATION ⇒ ADULTERY

Focus *here*, not *here*

- If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out
- What's an application of this?

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 - ❖ It's better to miss out on *Game of Thrones* if it is a temptation
 - ❖ Hungry, Angry, Lonely/alone, Tired: Avoid triggers, avoid an empty gas tank

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- The law forbids adultery; Jesus teaches:

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- If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out
- What's an application of this?

- ❖ It's better to lose an eye than to be thrown into hell
- ❖ Hungry

Live as if following Jesus were more important to you than entertainment and pleasure—and this will mean being *deliberate* about priorities

temptation
as task

This week: divorce

- Matthew 5:31: “*It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*”

This is a tough topic

- Many (most?) of us have been touched by divorce
 - ❖ Half of marriages end in divorce
 - ❖ Churches in generations past haven't always done well with this topic
 - ❖ As a result, divorced Christians often feel shame and guilt
- This is on top of feelings of pain, disappointment, betrayal and loss
- If the shame of previous generations in the church was unhealthy, the high rate of divorce is too

**Our culture and our churches need wise teaching
from Jesus on this topic!**

Today's modest goal: *Understand what Jesus teaches*

- What we *won't* do today:
 - ❖ Explain or excuse the actions and policies of the church in days past
 - ❖ Pick up stones or pronounce judgment on you or your loved ones
- What we *will* do today:
 - ❖ Unpack Jesus' teaching
 - ❖ Understand it in light first-century culture
 - ❖ Think about what it means for us

If our discussion makes you want to talk more to someone, our pastors and Council members (as well as myself) are here for you

Background: Jesus on Divorce

- Deuteronomy 24:1-4: Divorce is permitted in cases of “indecency”
- This was a hotly debated topic in Jesus’ day

RABBI SHAMMAI

- Indecency should be narrowly construed, i.e. unchastity

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- “Even if he found someone else prettier than she”

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The *in flagrante delicto* school

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The *burnt toast* school

Jews and Romans treated divorce differently

- Roman law permitted either husband or wife to divorce each other, regardless of the others' wishes
- Except in extraordinary circumstances, Jewish law permitted only the husband to divorce the wife, regardless of her wishes
- *Women in both cultures were usually financially and legally dependent on their husbands*
- “The purpose of the Deuteronomy 24 law itself was probably ‘to check haste in divorce’, hence to provide some legal protection for the wife” [Keener]

Jesus focuses on the *purpose* of marriage

- Matthew 19:3: Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?”
- 4 He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

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- 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” 8 He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

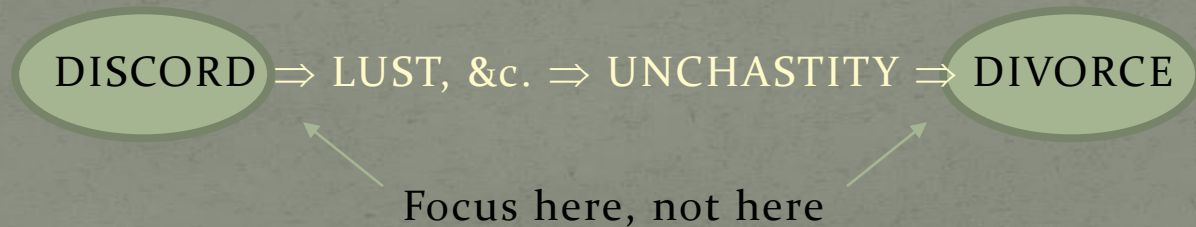
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Porneia: forbidden sexual acts, e.g. adultery, prostitution, incest, etc.; more general than the specific term for adultery, *moichaō*

Jesus focuses on the *purpose* of marriage

- 10 His disciples said to him, “*If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.*”
- 11 But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”



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DISCORD ⇒ DISTANCE ⇒ CONFLICT, ANGER ⇒ DIVORCE

Focus here, not here

Paul's teaching makes it clear this wasn't just legalism

- Just as Jesus didn't prohibit all forms of anger or sexual desire, and “just as the exceptions to Jesus' commands are more implicit than explicit, so also 5:32 most likely does not reflect a consideration of every conceivable legitimate or illegitimate ground for divorce. Instead Jesus is responding to a specific debate in first-century Judaism.
- “At least Paul seems to have recognized Jesus' words as not comprehensive, since in 1 Cor 7:15 he introduces a second legitimate ground for divorce that Jesus never mentions.” (Craig Blomberg)
- 1 Corinthians 7:15: *“But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.”*

God sometimes allows what's less than ideal

- Due to weakness or hardness of heart:
 - ❖ God permitted Israel to have a king (1 Sam 12:12-13)
 - ❖ God led Israel through the desert, not near the Philistines, lest they change their minds and return to Egypt (Ex 13:17)
- The law of Moses often tolerated and regulated that which was less than best (and in some cases downright bad):
 - ❖ Slavery, avengers of blood, polygyny, marrying captive Gentile women, and (here) divorce)

Jesus challenges the Pharisees of proof-texting when they should have been reading in light of God's entire plan

Jesus: With your whole heart try to achieve God's aims

- Jesus is stricter than Shammai because Shammai couldn't invalidate Hillel marriages; Jesus does [Keener]
- Jesus wants us to back up and ask how to make God's will for us a reality
- ...and like the "gouged eyes" teaching, if we don't think we are up to it, maybe we should take the high road and not marry at all
 - ❖ The eunuch reference would have had the same "ick factor" for Jews as it does for us
 - ❖ Far more than with *Game of Thrones*, we might need to sacrifice to achieve this

Wherever you are at (married, single, divorced),
wherever your relationships are at (healthy? toxic?),
*aim high and try to make it a reality by God's strength
and with the support of others*

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Paul adds: don't focus on judgment; you are forgiven and set free. Focus on love and obedience whatever the cost

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Modern conservative Christians often allow divorce for the 3 A's

- Adultery
- Addiction
- Abuse

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Q: How can we follow Jesus' teaching without just joining the burnt-toast school?

Modern conservative Christians often allow divorce for the 3 A's

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- Addiction
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If you are just starting out in marriage, work very hard to make a healthy marriage that will last.

Q: What does this teaching say to those who are about out of hope?

If you are divorced, what is it like to talk to Jesus?

- We have record of a conversation between Jesus and a multiply divorced woman in John 4
- Jesus doesn't let honor/shame/culture keep him from interacting with her
- He doesn't ignore her broken marriages but he also doesn't shame or harangue her; Jesus points her to himself
- "Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'"



Q: What does her reaction to Jesus tell us about her experience of their conversation?

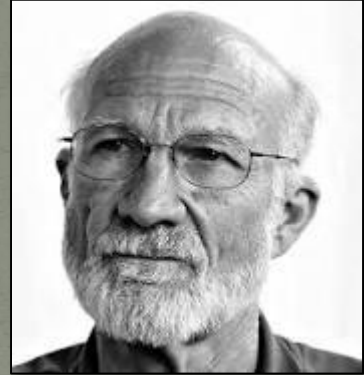
Modern churches often treat divorce as no-fault

1. Husband leaves wife
2. Husband leaves the local church
3. Church intervenes, encourages counseling, threatens discipline, but does nothing public
4. Leadership meets privately with the wife to offer support
5. The wife, lacking public or corporate support, also leaves the local church

Q: How can we improve on this process?

Maybe we've been looking at the SOTM all wrong

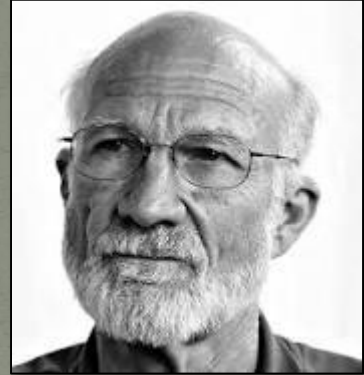
- Stanley Hauerwas, modern evangelist for Mennonite views and Duke University's *bad boy* of theology:
- “All the so-called ‘hard sayings’ of the SOTM are designed to remind us that we cannot live without depending on the support and trust of others. We are told not to lay up treasure for ourselves so we must learn to share. We are told not to be anxious, not to try to ensure the future, thus making it necessary to rely on one another for food, clothing, and housing. We are told not to judge, thereby requiring that we live honestly and truthfully with one another. Such a people have no need to parade their piety because they know in a fundamental sense it is not theirs.



From “Living the
Proclaimed Reign of God”,
Interpretation 47, 152-8
(1993)

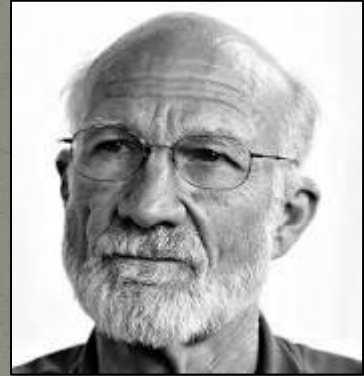
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- “Rather, the piety of the community capable of hearing and living by the Sermon is that which knows the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees is possible on when a people have learned that the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees is possible only when a people have learned that their righteousness is a gift from God gives them through making them learn to serve one another.



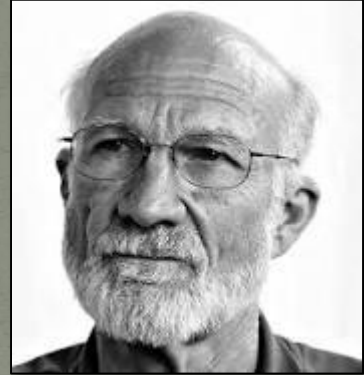
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- “Surely this is also the necessary presupposition for understanding the antitheses in Matthew 5. To be capable of living chastely, to marry without recourse to divorce, to live without the necessity of oaths, to refrain from returning evil with evil, to learn to love the enemy is surely impossible for isolated individuals.



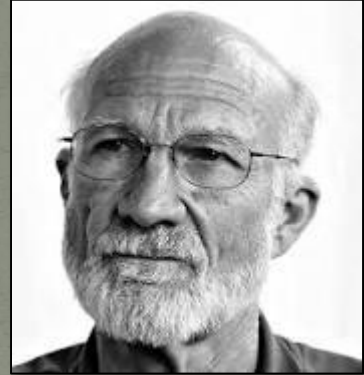
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Q: How have you found it easier to follow Jesus teachings by being in a trusting, loving Christian community—if you have?