

# SIMPLE FAITH

## Simple Instructions on Serious Issues

*Matthew 5:27–37*



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

There's no more telltale sign of a society's moral erosion than the breakdown of integrity. In domestic settings, this breakdown reveals itself most dramatically in marital infidelity. In the personal lives of individuals, it evidences itself most clearly in verbal dishonesty. When partners cheat on each other . . . when people lie to one another, a community's moral fiber weakens and quickly deteriorates.

Such things should not characterize those who claim to belong to Christ.

In His greatest of sermons, Jesus addressed both these issues. As He did, He went deeper than the letter of the Law. He made it clear that marriage requires absolute faithfulness, and personal relationships require absolute truthfulness.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. A Brief Reminder of the Sermon's Beginning

Jesus introduced His sermon by blessing those among His audience who exuded an approach to life consistent with what life would be like in the kingdom. Then Jesus exhorted His audience to make an impact in their communities by being salt and light. Finally, Jesus called the people to a deeper relationship with God—one that emphasized heart change and not just behavior modification.



## Quotable

*We must replace  
evil thoughts with  
wholesome, healthy,  
righteous thoughts.*

*It's a choice.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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### 2. A Clear Declaration of Two Timeless Absolutes (Matthew 5:27–37)

Marital fidelity and verbal honesty sit at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. But as Jesus made clear in the Sermon on the Mount, these are not just outward acts of obedience but inward attitudes of the heart.



#### **DOORWAY TO HISTORY**

##### *Divorce in First-Century Israel*

When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about divorce, He did so within a particular context that many Bible readers today do not know (Matthew 19:3–9). It helps, then, to understand the Jewish cultural positions on divorce as they related both to men and women, as well as to an inter-Pharisee debate involving the conditions for divorce. Insight on each of these positions brings much-needed clarity to Jesus' teaching on this contentious topic.

- Men in first-century Judaism were allowed to divorce for virtually any reason they wished. Furthermore, men alone could initiate and sign any official divorce certificate. The consequences for a man who divorced his wife varied depending on the reason. If the wife were at fault—such as in an adulterous relationship—she would forfeit her dowry to her husband and return to her parents in disgrace. On the other hand, if the man dismissed his wife simply because he no longer preferred her or because she prepared his meal poorly, the woman would have been allowed to take the dowry back with her. In addition, the man may have been required to make a large payment to his wife's family for sending her back under such dubious circumstances. This latter scenario kept divorce costly for the man, which served to lessen its occurrence.
- Women in the first century could not officially initiate divorce proceedings, nor could they serve their husbands with divorce papers. However, if a woman found herself in a difficult marital situation, she could approach the court and encourage them to act on her behalf and essentially persuade her husband to write a divorce certificate. The lack of rights for women helps contextualize

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*Continued from previous page*

Jesus' statement that divorce leads to adultery (Matthew 5:31–32). Most women in the first century could not support themselves financially; therefore, were a man in the first century to divorce his wife, she would have limited options for survival. Remarriage was a virtual necessity. But because a woman could not divorce a man for any reason, a divorced woman's remarriage would be counted as adultery in every case.

- The inter-Pharisee debate on divorce occurred between the Hillel and Shammai schools of thought. Both groups claimed Deuteronomy 24:1 as their key verse, but they each interpreted it differently. The Hillel school believed that divorce was permissible for any reason, interpreting “some indecency” (Deuteronomy 24:1) to mean any ill behavior. The Shammai school interpreted that same phrase as a reference only to adulterous behavior, thus limiting divorce significantly. In one important way, though, these groups were in unison: they were concerned about the conditions for divorce rather than the preservation of marriage.



### LET'S LIVE IT

Personal commitment to the teachings of Jesus grounds His people in a way of life consistent with life in God's kingdom. From this passage, we divine two practical applications:

- *Marry for all of life, or do not marry for all your life.* The force of Jesus' teaching about marriage in the Sermon on the Mount is permanence. When we think about marriage, permanence should be our emphasis as well.
- *Say what you mean, and mean what you say.* Our words should always match our deeds. The ease with which we can deceive others (and ourselves) should encourage us to be vigilant in this area.

**How can you strengthen your life in the area of verbal honesty?**



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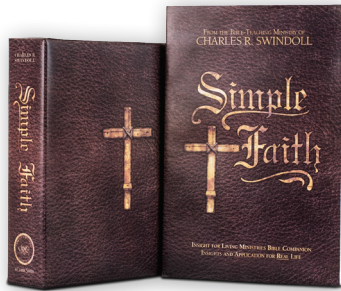
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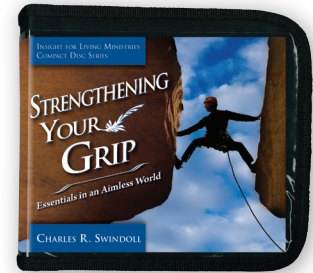
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