

LEFC Sermon Handout: Summary of Jesus' Teaching on Divorce UPDATED 28/12/24

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 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. (From Matthew 5).

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 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'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." AND I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." (From Matthew 19).

These verses are *not* the sum total of what the Bible teaches about divorce or remarriage but a summary of Jesus' teaching in the book of Matthew.

- 1) Jesus does not permit divorce but will recognise it in the case of sexual immorality.
(Matt 19 update) The implication being that God does not recognise divorce where no sexual immorality was involved.
- 2) If two people get divorced where no sexual immorality was involved, they will be committing adultery if either of them remarry different people.
- 3) Anyone who marries a person, who was previously divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality, commits adultery.
- 4) Sexual immorality is the only permissible grounds for divorce.
- 5) Remarriage is only permissible for a divorced person if they were divorced on grounds of sexual immorality *and* they are marrying either:
 - Someone who has never been married before.
 - Someone who was married and whose spouse has died.
 - Someone who was married and was divorced on grounds of sexual immorality.
- 6) If a person does marry or remarry (in ignorance, due to lack of knowledge, understanding or counsel about Jesus' teaching) *outside* of these parameters, they are to remain married, and should be treated by the Church as married. Divorce again is only a consideration on the grounds of sexual immorality. Repentance should be sought.
(Matt 19 update) In a post-fall world, we cannot often apply Jesus' teaching consistently and must apply grace in every situation recognising the complexity of modern relationships.
- 7) If a person marries or remarries (willfully, deliberately and against explicit teaching and counsel from elders and in contradiction to their knowledge of the scriptures) outside of the Biblical parameters, they open themselves up to church discipline according to Matthew chapter 18.

Some gracious words of comfort from scripture.

First

For any Christian who has been divorced and or remarried outside of the conditions Jesus has laid out for us, hear the words of God by John: [If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us...](#) My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. [He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins...](#) Yes, it might be right to repent of divorce or remarriage. Yet, if you are *today* living by faith in the son of God who loved you and gave himself for you, guilt is not for you, but the joy of salvation. Be thankful for the marriage you do now have, and let it be held in honour going forward.

Second

To any Christian who is not married due to divorce, please find encouragement, not disappointment, from the words of God by James: [Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.](#) Singleness can be a very real trial. Yet, in the strange providence of God, like all trials, singleness can be a gift for the strengthening of our faith. In Christ, you lack nothing!

Third

To any Christian who longs for marriage but would see it now as out of bounds according to Jesus' teaching, hear the words of God by Paul: [I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— and his interests are divided.](#) Recognise your situation in light of God's sovereignty and follow Paul's advice to concern yourself with a special dedication to Church service, and just see how the Lord might bless your efforts of undivided devotion, just as he blessed Paul's.

Fourth

The Church must take care of those who are prevented, for whatever reason, from being in secure family setups. Let us again hear the words of God by James: [Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.](#) We should also include divorced people. Today, divorce affects people much in the same way as widowhood did in Jesus' day. As long as we remain a church there will be those who are lonely because a marriage has ended. And we *must* care for those people. That doesn't mean we ignore any sin, but it does mean we look upon them with a special affection and seek to bring them deeply into church family life - that the Lord may comfort them through us!

Fifth (Matt 19 update)

Pursue faithfulness in marriage as a display of God's faithfulness to us and hear the words given to Isaiah: [For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is his name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back...](#) If at all possible, make your marriages work and treat divorce as a last resort. We're supposed to look at married people who have been through better and worse together, who have remained faithful to

each other through sickness and health, who have stuck by each other being richer and poorer and be reminded of how committed to us God is. He will stand by *me* through whatever I'm going through and whatever I'm like. And we are to feel secure and hopeful in *his* faithfulness. Marriage ultimately points us to the cross - the crux of God's faithfulness.