



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Modern Family April 1/2, 2017 - Jeff Bucknam
Jesus Teaches on Marriage and Divorce - (Matthew 19:3-10)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

My in-laws had their fiftieth wedding anniversary, well, a few years ago now. My parents --my mom died two years prior to their fiftieth wedding anniversary, so I thought that was going to be the first one that I was at, but my mom passed away, and so the first one was my inlaws. I remember sitting there, it was in a location near the water in Bellingham, just south of here, and I remember watching the slide show and seeing these two young people get married and all the festivities, and then all these different pictures through their life --I mean the fiftieth wedding anniversary you get a lot of slides, so it was a long slide show. It took several songs and in the back you're getting a little teary-eyed as your watching this. So as I was looking at it I thought, "This is so rare, this kind of event." Now, I don't know if you've been to a fiftieth wedding anniversary. Some of you I'm sure have, but not a lot of them. And you might say, "Well, that's because, yeah, a lot of people pass away before they get there. It's more likely that they don't get there because marriage is hard. A lot of marriages end before they get to fifty years.

Scarlett Johansson is the name of the woman who is widely considered to be the most attractive woman in the western world. At least People Magazine says, so it must be true [laughter]. So, she plays Black Widow on the Avengers series and if you know a bit about her, she has a new movie coming out soon. She just divorced her second husband recently and was interviewed about why that was. Several other issues she was interviewed about, but she included some stuff about her marriage, and her view on marriage and divorce is interesting. She said, "I think the idea of marriage is very romantic. It's a beautiful idea and the practice of it can be a very beautiful thing, but I don't think it's natural to be a monogamous person. I think it's work. I think it's a lot of work and the fact that it's such work for so many people proves that it's not a natural thing." Apparently she wants the easy way, which is not monogamy. I think she voices the viewpoint of lots and lots of people in the world today. It's difficult. Not just monogamy, but sitting --you know, like, living together with another person for a long time. And they're a sinner and you're a sinner, and your sin starts to cross each other, and eventually it becomes just so difficult that you can't see a way forward, and you give up.

Fiftieth wedding anniversaries are rare but divorce is not. In fact, recent statistics suggest that eight out of ten people have been affected by divorce. Now, that doesn't mean that they've been divorced themselves. What it means is that their parents have been, their children are, they themselves are, their siblings are. That divorce is something that is in all of our lives and some point or another and it's devastating. You don't need me to say that. I never met a couple who stood before God and these witnesses, as I read out the passages of scripture, and say, "Do you take and you, you take..." I've never seen them as their thinking about the fish and how she looks in her gown, making grand



pronouncements of their love for one another on that great day of days. I've never heard one of them say, "Man, I hope this ends poorly." Of course not. It's going to last forever. We use language like that, even in the ceremony. "I will love you forever," we say, in our vows. And yet, so often it doesn't happen and it devastates us. And because of its devastation, it's the kind of thing that we don't talk about a lot at church because it touches all of us and it stings when we talk about it. We don't talk about it very much. Kent Hughes wrote,

"The mere mention of the word 'divorce' is painful to some. Many have been deeply wounded by broken marriages, and a discussion of the subject brings up memories and feelings they'd like to forget. For this reason, preachers find little joy in preaching on the subject. But Jesus obviously thinks it's important. It's a subject we dare not ignore. To see this matter through his eyes is good for us as individuals, good for the church, and good for society."

I think he's right about that because that's the case we wanted to include. This passage in particular, Matthew 19:3-10, that give Jesus' view, quite honestly, on marriage and divorce. It's not the only thing that's said about this subject in the Bible. We had another sermon in this series on 1 Corinthians 7. Jesus also talks about it in Mark's gospel, but this is maybe the most full discussion of Jesus' teaching on it. So we want to talk about it.

I'm going to share with you today what Jesus has to say about divorce and giving you three lessons from this passage. Now here's what I want you to do. I want you to play the part of what we call the Bereans. The Berean church was one, in the book of Acts, that heard what Paul taught them and they evaluated it according to scripture. I want you to do that today. I want you to determine whether or not what I'm saying - the three points I'm making - are from the text. And if you decide they're not, you have full freedom to totally disregard what it is that I say. But if you come to the conclusion that these three statements I'm going to make are from the passage and they're a faithful representation of it, then your disagreement or frustration is not with Jeff. Here they are:

1. Marriages are created by God to last a lifetime
2. Divorce happens due to hard hearts
3. Divorce is permissible in certain circumstances.

Say those again. Marriages are created by God to last a lifetime, divorce happens due to hard hearts, and divorce is permissible in certain circumstances. We're going to walk through this passage together and I'm going to use those kind of as the outline for us, okay?

[Marriages Are Created by God to Last a Lifetime]

Here's the first one: Marriages are created by God to last a lifetime. That's his intent. Verse three of Matthew 19,

"Some pharisees came to him to test him, asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'"

Okay, see that last phrase? For any and every reason? That was code language to a theological debate that two schools within the Pharisaic tradition were having with each other. Do you ever hang



around with people who know theology and they'll use tag lines or shorthand to describe a theological debate? "Well you know it's the Calvinist-Arminian debate." And if you're not acquainted with that, you're like, "I don't know what that is." This is one of those debates that they were having. The Pharisees had two schools within them. One was called *Hillel*, one was called *Shammai*. Hillel was the more progressive branch and Shammai, the more conservative, and they disagreed about what God taught about divorce in the Old Testament. Meaning what was allowable. So, their disagreement came from Deuteronomy 24, which reads this way, okay? Listen to the language.

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds anything indecent... [That's the key phrase.]... anything indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and gives it to her and sends her from his house..."

Now, that sentence goes on, but the key point here is that phrase, "anything indecent". Shammai, the more conservative group wanted to say, "Okay, let's focus on the word "indecent". Moses is giving permission for people to divorce if the husband finds something *indecent* about her. So let's debate what indecent means." They did. They debated what indecent meant. It talked about all sorts of different acts that a woman could do to her husband or away from her husband that would warrant such a thing. They were usually sexual acts at some point or another, but that's the only reasons, according to Shammai, that you could get divorced. Hillel, they responded by saying, "Okay you guys are focusing on that word *indecent* in the phrase. We should focus on the *anything*." And they argued that a man could divorce a wife for *any* cause. And you say, "What do you mean any cause, like, *any* cause, any cause?" Uh-huh, that's what I mean. I mean, for example, if she were to walk around in public with her hair down. In that culture it was somewhat shameful and didn't signify she was married. Well then, you could divorce her for that. You could divorce her for talking to other men. You could divorce her for speaking disrespectfully about your parents in your presence. "You know honey, I think your mom is a bit of a pain." "Okay, that's it!" [laughter]. You could divorce for her ruining dinner or breakfast. "These eggs are divorceable" [laughter].

Rabbi Akiba wrote, about 200 years after the time of Christ, but just along this line. He was part of Hillel, he said,

"A man may divorce his wife even if he finds another fairer than she."

So, avoid beaches. Now, I'm making fun of it because it's crazy. Whatever whim the husband has, he can divorce his wife for that. It's any-cause divorce. So, these Pharisees come up to Jesus and they say to him, "Okay, what's your view on this any-cause divorce? Are you Hillel or Shammai? Now, you need to know, they are not coming to Jesus and saying to him, "Oh teach us, great teacher. We want to learn from your wisdom. Let us sit at your feet as you tell us the truth. We're listening." That's not what they're doing. Notice in Matthew 19:3. The text we're working with here.

"Some pharisees came to him to test him..."



So, they want to put him on what we call, *on the horns of a dilemma*. They want to make it so that he is caught in his words. So, here's what that looks like. If he sides with Hillel and says, "Yeah, yeah, you can get divorced for any reason. The party of Hillel is right," then they will make fun of Jesus. Everyone will also make fun of Jesus in the same way they made fun of Hillel. Most Jewish people thought that was crazy and they certainly thought that it doesn't take the law of God seriously. So, if he sides with Hillel, it means that Jesus is not the profit that he said he was, he's not the authoritative rabbi he said he was, he doesn't follow in Moses' way. But, if he sides with Shammai, and says, "Actually, there are very few reasons for divorce," well, he might arise the ire of some people who are more dangerous than just the people. Here's what I mean. If you go back in Matthew's gospel and you go to Matthew 14, what you will find is a story about how John the Baptist lost his head. He was beheaded. That's how he died. He was beheaded because the ruler of the land, Herod, had taken his brother's wife while his brother was still alive. Herodias was her name and he took her to be his wife. So, an unlawful divorce, and he took Herodias, and John the baptist said, "Uh-uh. That's against God's law." And because he said this publicly, Harrod hated him and wanted him to die and when he got the opportunity, he beheaded the man. So, they come to Jesus, these pharisees, and they said, "If you side with Shammai, like John the Baptist did, you're going to lose your thinker, which is great for us. So, either you lose the attention and admiration of the people, or you lose your head. B]oth are good. "Hehehehe." I mean, you've got to picture them coming to him going, "We totally got him!" They want to kill him. They don't have the guts to do it themselves, so they're like, "Okay, we're going to make something..." There is no way he can get out of this." Right? But, he's clever because he's Jesus. [Matthew 19:4]

"Haven't you read, '...'" ["See, your problem guys, is that you don't read your Bibles"] "Haven't you read", he replied, "that at the beginning ["You go all the way back to the start, the beginning of your Bibles"] "...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 flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." ["You guys are so dumb," he says. "You're teachers of the law? Come on now, just go back and read your Bibles. It's so plain. There it is. He made them male and female, the two became one flesh, what God joins together let no one separate."]

Marriage, in other words, is *permanent*. The images he uses here, too, to talk about the permanence of marriage are really important for you and I to get, okay? He uses two images. One is the one-flesh. "The two shall become one flesh." Here's his point. Just imagine that my left hand is causing me all sorts of difficulty, right? It reaches into the cookie jar and eats the cookies and the brownies and all that. Five Guys Burgers, like, "Stop! You dumb hand!" Right? And it's always getting me into trouble. All the time. Whenever I drive by people, it's the hand that shows them the one way to heaven, okay? [laughter]. So, I'm going to stop my hand from doing this. So, the solution to stop my hand from doing this is to what? To dismember it [sound effect for cutting]. "Done." Now you'd say, if you were a smart person, "Okay, that's dumb. You should not do that." And the reason that you're saying that is because my hand has an intimate relationship with the rest of my body. There are not two of me. There is not the left-hand-Jeff and the rest of Jeff. There is one whole flesh. To dismember yourself in that way is to break what God has made... *whole*. That's Jesus' point. The two become one. When the apostle Paul has an opportunity to talk about marriage in Ephesians 5, and he wants to instruct husbands on how they're supposed to



love their wives, he says, “You should love your wife as yourself.” Why does he say that? Because she *is* yourself. Because the two have become one and you need to understand that one is permanent. The same way your body is permanently together. The two are permanently together. Notice the other language he uses. “What God has joined together, let no man separate.”

When I was in grade four, I had a teacher who had acquired a grant from the government so that we could go around and go to different art shops and create clay structures and clay things. In grade four I remember sitting at the potter’s wheel and making clay stuff and taking the water and stuff. I remember the pinnacle of that year for me was making this little clay dinosaur, which I still have somewhere. It looks like a mutated dog. It’s pretty bad, but it’s grade four, right? And I remember being so proud of this. So, I remember all the guys in my class were so proud of their dinosaurs and we had to take our dinosaurs, give it to our teacher, who put it on a shelf in the back for everyone to see. Right after school she was going to put it in the kiln to kind of make it permanent and hard. Well, late that afternoon, before school ended, but just at the end of the day, there was this one boy in our class, a bit of a bully, and he went to the back and he picked up one of the clay dinosaurs that was made by another kid in our class. He put it on the ground, and when a bunch of us were standing around watching, he jumped up in the air and he squished it under his foot. My teacher was this soft-spoken Hawaiian woman and she lost her mind. She raced to the back of the class, she grabbed hold of him, and, today I imagine she’d be fired, but she grabbed hold of his shirt, she pulled him tight and she said, “Who do you think you are? You made your own one. If you want to destroy the one you made, fine, but if you’re going to destroy the one someone else makes, who do you think you are?” That’s what Jesus is saying here. “Look, who do you think you are to destroy the creation of God?” Listen, I know when you stand there in front of God and these witnesses and you’re thinking about your dress and the reception and all that stuff, you think this is one prelude to a party, but what you’re witnessing is God making a new thing. Two into one. What God then joins together, let not man separate. Who has the right to destroy what God makes? You see the point he’s making. Marriages are intended by God to be permanent. They are His creation intended to last a lifetime. *Intended* to last a lifetime. That’s the way he originally planned it.

[Divorce Happens Due to Hard Hearts]

Point two then. Divorce happens due to hard hearts. Here’s verse seven. They’ve got him on the horns of a dilemma, he sided himself now kind of with Shammai. Not completely, but he sided himself with the Shammai school, so they’re going to follow their trap. [Matthew 19:7-8]

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” [“See, you’re limiting it, Jesus. And Moses, who you’re supposed to be in line with, Moses said that we could do it. In fact, he *commanded* that we give her a certificate of divorce.”]

Is that true? They’re appealing to Deuteronomy 24. Remember the text that I read you a minute ago? Is it true, that Moses commanded, in that passage, that they give their wives a certificate of divorce? I’ll read the text to you again. Deuteronomy 24, and you need to decide, as I’m reading it, is this a command?



“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds anything indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,...

Then it finishes the sentence. Then there’s a whole bunch of things that should happen.

So here’s the question: are *if* statements commands? Well, no, they’re not. They’re concessions. There accommodations. They read a command into this passage where God was actually just giving a concession. Here, I’ll put it like this. My son has been learning how to drive his car lately. My car in fact. It’s a standard. We’ve been driving it all over town and stalling at most lights, which has been great. If you were late to a meeting yesterday because you were behind a little red car that stalled, we are sorry, okay? [laughter]. Most of the town was probably late. He’s learning, though, right? That’s how all of us learn, as you’re going. Things that you are teaching your kids, if you are teaching them how to drive, you teach them all the proper edicate of the road, but you also know in the back of your mind, that sometimes when you’re driving, bad things happen. They either happen because you’re not paying attention or someone else isn’t paying attention. So you say to your kids, “Okay, if you get in an accident.” You usually say this after you’ve driven with them in the passenger seat, for like, three minutes. “If you get in an accident, here’s what you’ve got to do. Make a phone call, you’ve got to get your insurance papers out, make sure you’re safe. You know, wear your seatbelt. If you get in an accident.” If my son heard me say, “If you get in an accident, do these things,” and he walked out and he said to his friends, “Dude, my dad commanded me to have an accident,” he would be a liar. I did not. I told you, I accommodated to the reality that there might be an accident because I live in a fallen world. In an ideal world, it doesn’t happen. But in a fallen world, where people make mistakes and drive around here like they do, accidents happen. That’s what is happening here. That’s what God did in his law and Jesus knows it. So when they say “Oh, Moses commanded us,” here’s what he said. [Matthew 9:8]

“Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.’”

God’s intention from the very get-go was that you *not* divorce your wife, but he recognizes that we live in a fallen world where people’s hearts get hard toward him and people go their own way. So He’s created laws, like this one on divorce in Deuteronomy 24, to curb your sinful appetites, so that your world doesn’t go screaming haywire, sideways everywhere.

Have you ever met people who will say, if they learn that you’re a Christian, and they say something like, “Christian? You know that Bible you believe? It teaches that we should have slaves. Did you know that that Bible teaches that you should be polygamous?” It talks about polygamy, it talks about slavery. There are laws in the Old Testament that regulate slavery and regulate polygamy, right? So therefore, ergo, it endorses slavery and polygamy. Is that true? No, a concession does not mean a command. What God is doing is he’s saying, “Listen, in a perfect world --you go back to the creation account, there are no slaves. There’s no multiple wives. You go back to the creation account, it’s perfect. What’s



happened? Well, human sin has happened, so now we live in a fallen world, and so I'm going to give a law that curbs the appetites of the people in that fallen world. It makes it so that the place doesn't go completely haywire. The point here, is that Jesus teaches that divorce was never God's desire. He gave a concession due to hard hearts.

So, you might say to yourself, "Okay, well what does a hard heart mean? What does that look like?" Well, the Bible is filled with examples of that, a hard heart happens when Eve eats the apple and ignores what God has to say. But maybe the most famous hard heart in the entire Bible is --you want to try this one? Pharaoh. In the Old Testament, the king of Egypt, named Pharaoh, and he has all the people of Israel as his slaves. God comes to Moses and says, "Moses, go tell Pharaoh to let my people go," and Moses goes up to Pharaoh and shakes his finger and says... [This is the most powerful man in the entire planet at this point]. So Moses shakes his finger in the most powerful man in the whole planet's face and says, "Listen, God says, Yahweh says, 'let my people go.'" And what does Pharaoh say? "Who is this God that I should obey him? Moses, I don't know if you noticed as you were walking into the palace that I'm a pretty important dude. My way or the highway... you got it? So, this God that you claim has all this power, I don't see that power because his people are my slaves. So, who's this God that I should obey him?" It's a wonderful picture of a hard heart.

This person who says, "I will not see it from God's point of view. I remain entrenched in my viewpoint. My wife said to me the other day when I was talking a little bit about this sermon to her, she said, "You have a hard heart toward broccoli." I said, "Yes! Right!" You can cover it with cheese or chocolate or, I don't know. I'm not touching it... it's horrible. Right. Those who have hard hearts towards the Lord remain entrenched in their viewpoints. They don't see things God's way. A hard hearted person remains stridently and immovably convinced that their way is better.

So here's how this plays out when it comes to a subject like marriage and divorce. So, you're reading in your Bible and you come to a passage like 1 Corinthians 7, where the apostle Paul is talking to Christian married people and he gives them a direct apostolic command. He says, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11,

"To the married..." [To a Christian husband with his Christian wife] "To the married I give this command..." ["But it's not just my command"] "(not I, but the Lord):..." ["I'm going to quote Jesus", he says.] "...A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."

And you read that, and you think about the culture in which you live, and you think, "Well, that's just crazy talk." You're faced with a challenge now. You can say to that passage, "Who is this Lord that I should obey him?" Or, you can say, like Mary did, "Let it be to me as you have said." Your response in that moment tells an awful lot about the nature and softness of your heart.

My wife and I have had a couple of disagreements in our married life. Like two of them and I have been right on both occasions. [laughter] Here's what happens when we've had these very rare disagreements. One of us will go for a walk, usually her, and I will sit on the corner of my bed and I will



reiterate to the Lord the reasons why she is wrong. [laughter] And I will say to the Lord, “This is a justice issue, Father.” Right? “I’m clearly right. I mean, put it to the court. You’re the great judge. You can judge, clearly, that I’m right for these four reasons.” And here’s what the Lord does. I believe that the Spirit of God uses the Word of God in these moments, and so He takes scripture and He runs it through my mind. The problem with going to seminary is you learn a lot of scripture, right? So the Lord has got a lot of ammunition now. So He runs these Scriptures and they’re Scriptures about reconciliation, they’re Scriptures about forgiveness, they’re Scriptures about the Gospel and how Jesus actually forgave me in places where I don’t deserve forgiveness. Where He runs after me, where He comes to me, and in response I reiterate my four points to the Lord. But the Lord keeps coming with this and there comes a point in this dialogue with the Spirit of God where I either have to make a decision to say, “Who is this Lord that I should obey him?” Or, “Let it be to me as you have said.” Now listen very closely. The future of your marriage depends upon how you respond there. People get divorced because of entrenched hard hearts and unwillingness to say to the Lord, “You are right.”

My father-in-law was a pastor for 35 years. He counselled hundreds of couples. He told me on one occasion when we were talking about this very subject, he said, “You know Jeff, I’ve never sat in a room with two people who have soft hearts to the Lord who get divorced, ultimately.” Divorce happens due to hard hearts.

[Divorce is Permissible in Certain Circumstances]

Here’s the last one: Divorce is permissible in certain circumstances. Look at verse eight again. I’m going to read it again and then we’ll finish the passage. [Matthew 9:8]

“Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.’” [And then, listen, He doubles down. Like he ratchets it up.] “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” [“You guys wanted to put me on the horns of the dilemma? You wanted to catch me in my words, let me just come out with it. Boom! You should do everything you can to avoid divorce. Getting married is a 100% commitment. That’s God’s intention, it should be your attitude, it should follow through in the way of your life.”]

There’s a great story that preachers love to tell. I love to tell it as well. It’s about Hernan Cortez, who was a Spanish explorer, who came to the Yucatan Peninsula in what’s now Mexico in 1519. He came from Spain all the way across the sea. He was going to come to take all the Aztec gold back to his queen. He arrived with 500 soldiers and 100 sailors and they got off the boats on to the beach and they realized, in that moment, that all the Aztec armies were entrenched and sitting above them, and they realized, there is no way we can do this. I mean, they’re not just going to usher us into the gold and say, “Here you have it.” They have marshalled their forces, ready to fight us. Cortez’s men saw this and, being thinking men, thought, “This is crazy. There is no way we can do this.” So what they did is, in the dark of night, they decided they would organize a group to go back to the ships and to get on the ships and go straight to Cuba and sit on the beach there. Cortez found out about it. He killed the mutinous sailors and soldiers and then, in the sight, on the beach, in the sight of all the rest of them, as they all lined up there, he sent a few men out to the boat and he said, “Burn them. Burn every last ship to the



bottom of the sea.” There are men there and they are crying, pleading with him to stop. “How on earth are we going to get home?” Cortez said, “If we’re going to get home, it’s going to be on their ships.” 100% full blooded commitment. Burn the ships. I really do think that’s Jesus’ intent here.

Listen I want you to take the word divorce and I want you to remove it from your vocabulary. If you decide you want to get married, it is all in, no way out. Now, you might say, “Well, come on Jeff, that’s a little bit hard”, but listen, read the next verse. Matthew 19:10 says,

“The disciples said to him,...” [So, when they hear this and his teaching, his disciples, who were there, said to him...].“If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

So, you know you’re on the right track in understanding what it is that Jesus has to teach here, if your conclusion is, “You should just stay single.” It’s just going to be easier for you to stay single. “I don’t know if you can make it all the way. I don’t know if you should burden yourself. I don’t know.” Full blooded commitment. Divorce off the radar. That’s his intention.

Now, if you’re reading along with me, you will note that I haven’t been completely truthful with that sentence. The sentence says,

“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality...”

So there’s an exception clause here. “Hey, Jeff, what about the exception clause?” Absolutely, you’re right. Jesus does leave one possibility. If one breaks the one-flesh arrangement, then one can get out of it. Now, what’s meant by sexual immorality here is a big debate. The greek word is *porneia*. We get it from the word *pornography*, but it means different things in different contexts. It’s kind of a catch-all term. If it’s in a context where married people are being talked about, the meaning is almost always the same. It means illicit intercourse. So, you can replace that phrase for the word there. “...*except for* [illicit intercourse]...” which is often what we call adultery. Here’s His point then: It’s not a sin to divorce if your spouse has had illicit intercourse with another during your marriage. I think I need to say that boldly to you because, you know, if you’ve been divorced, been the innocent party in the divorce, when your spouse has left you for another and has had illicit intercourse with another and you get divorced for that and you come to church, some people treat you like a pariah. The history of the church is not good here. We’ve acted like these people don’t belong. “<whispers>Did you know they divorced their spouse and did you read what the Bible says about divorce?</whispers>” It’s not true. It’s *not* a sin.

[Clarifications For Divorce]

Jesus allowed it. *But*, I want to boldly say that. It’s not a sin to divorce if your spouse has had illicit intercourse with another during your marriage, *but*. Can I give a couple important clarifications as we finish this, okay?

Clarification 1: Some people try to exploit that exception. You know what I mean? They want to drive a truck through it. So, they want to make illicit intercourse to mean more things. Well sexual



unfaithfulness means more stuff. So, here's the way I've heard this happen. Okay, we were talking about adultery, but did you know earlier in the book of Matthew it says, in the Sermon on the Mount, "*If a man lusts after a woman, it's the same as him committing adultery.*" Therefore, every man who has lusted after a woman, his wife has the right to divorce.

So, here's my question in response to that: Does that kind of thinking, is it consistent with the overall thrust of this passage where Jesus is basically ratcheting up and making less available, divorce? No, it doesn't. Don't cobble together the Bible, here, to make it say what you want it to say. I have to use, in fact, specific language, like *illicit intercourse*, because people want to make words mean anything. "Oh, so if I make it more general..." Everyone starts driving trucks through the exception. Don't forget the emphasis of the passage. The disciples respond with shock and Jesus' word. You should be responding in shock at Jesus' words if you're right about this.

Here's my second clarification: A concession is not a command. Isn't that the error that these Pharisees made? They said, "No, no, you commanded it." No, Jesus is not commanding you to get a divorce if your spouse cheats on you. You have rights to. It's not a sin if you do, but you don't have to. Your marriage can continue.

Let me finish here by just telling you a story about some counsel I gave to a guy in a real situation. His spouse, his wife, she cheated on him three times and the first time he found out that she was struggling with alcoholism and bipolar disorder. So, they got her into rehab. She had a child, in fact, with that first affair, and he adopted the child. A few years later, through a number of years of really good married life, right? A few years later, he found out again that she had cheated on him again, because she had relapsed into alcoholism. So he had said, "Listen, you need to go to rehab again. I'm willing to take you back. I want to keep going here." And she said, "Yes, I want to as well." And again, she went to rehab and continued on with a few years of really good married life. The third time it happened, he called me on the phone and asked me to come to where they were. He lives in Seattle, so I drove down to Seattle and I ate fish and chips with him as he explained the situation. He said, "I've asked her to go to rehab again. I'm willing to try again if she's willing to do that, but she called me on the first day of rehab and said, 'I'm not going to rehab anymore. Take me or leave me.' What do I do?" So, I said, "Look, let me read a couple of passages out of the Scriptures about this and then tell you what my conclusions are." I read this passage, read the one in 1 Corinthians 7. "Okay, so here's what I have to say to you," I said to him. "First of all. If you choose to divorce your spouse, it is not a sin. You have rights to do so. Clearly. She has had illicit intercourse with another during your married life. You have a right to do that. So, that is an option, a live option for you. But, another live option is for you to remember the gospel of Jesus and how, as often as you have been unfaithful to Him, He has always welcomed you back. So, if she's willing to come back - yes, put some barriers up, put some standards up and all that kind of stuff - but, if she's willing to come back, you really have an opportunity right here to display that gospel to everyone in a way that they will stop and take notice. "Both are options, man," I said.

Now listen, he chose the first. He chose to divorce his wife. He's remarried, active in church life, has every right to do that. Should not be treated like a pariah in any way, but I think my counsel stands. I think it's a culmination of what it is that I'm reading here. Divorce is permitted in some circumstances,



but it's not a necessity. You can fight for your marriage. I know a lot of people who have and I've seen it grow and flourish in ways they never imagined. So, look, marriage is created by God to last a lifetime, divorce is due to hard hearts, and divorce is permissible in certain circumstances.

I have one last thing to say, okay, like an addendum, okay, that's the end of the sermon. You can go now, but here's my addendum, okay? So here's my last addendum. Can we just all agree that wrongful divorce is a sin and that Jesus died for sinners? So, there are lots of sins that we can commit. Wrongful divorce is one of them, but it's not *unforgivable*. So, if you've heard what I said here, you've concluded as I've gone through this that, "Yes, actually, you've been pretty faithful of what it is that this passage is teaching and Jesus is trying to say." Okay, fine, and you say, "Well I've been wrong about the way I've thought about it or acted it out in my life." Fine. Repent and believe the Gospel. Turn away from your thinking and your acting and embrace the good news that Jesus loves sinners like you and me. It might mean some cleanup of what's gone on in the past in your life and what that looks like might require some discussion across the table with a Care Pastor - care@northview.org - right? But, let's not leave today feeling spanked in any way. Lets leave today glorying in our Savior who loves us. [Amen] Repent and believe the Gospel. We end at the same place every time don't we?

Let me pray for us. Father, I'm so thankful for your grace, for your Word, and I pray, Father, for your richest blessing on us as we try to walk in your way. Let it be to us as You have said. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.