

Is Divorce an Unpardonable Sin in the Kingdom of God?

A few years ago, I was listening to a syndicated Christian radio program. A survivor of the holocaust was being interviewed. She described the horrific conditions of the concentration camps and then made a statement I'd never forget. She described the emotional pain and the brokenness she experienced from her divorce as greater than the pain of the concentration camp.

Six months later, another guest on the same program described the pain of losing her husband to cancer. She spoke about how his illness devastated their lives after ten long months of suffering. I was again moved to hear her say that she would have rather lost her husband to death by cancer than divorce.

Unbelievable! Two different women who had gone through more pain than many of us will ever know said that divorce is, or would be, more painful than death. My mind searched for understanding ... why was divorce more devastating than a concentration camp, or cancer?

For several weeks I pondered this question. My answer came: Death is a natural process and God makes provision, but the spiritual union of two people was never designed to be broken aside from death—the spirit is vulnerable in divorce and the pain is lasting. We may try to hide the pain that lingers, but it's always there waiting for the opportunity to rise again. Unless God rebuilds the foundation, those divorced may find themselves in the same situation with the second, third or fourth spouse.

The good news, however, is that both of the women referenced God's healing power. Regardless of what they had endured, God delivered them from emotional scares and feelings of

abandonment. Since divorce affects nearly half the population, we must allow God to deliver families from past pain and break the walls that imprison.

In the book, *Sacred Thirst*, the author writes, “The bride and groom are standing in front of everyone, looking better than they are ever going to look again, getting so much attention and affirmation. Everybody even stands when they walk in so it’s easy to think this marriage, at least, is about them. It’s not. Just look at the worn-out parents sitting in the first pew—they understand this. The only reason these parents are still married is because long ago they learned how to handle the hurt they caused each other. They know that the last thing you ever want to do with hurt is to let it define you.”

This last statement offers one of the most profound points that I’ve read on brokenness. Those who do not allow hurt to entrap them can turn brokenness into an unbreakable force, but those shackled by past pain are truly imprisoned by it. Married or divorced, the walls we build to protect may eventually imprison.

How can we undo the emotional pain that we experience from failed relationships? First, we must understand that it’s not an external fight, it’s an internal struggle: “For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). God works within us by transmitting healthy thoughts into godly actions. Our mind is where battles are either won or lost. Those who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger and hurt, never experience freedom, happiness or true restoration. It all starts here.

Ephesians 4:31-32 says to “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving

one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.” Simply stated, whether you were a victim of a failed marriage, or the offender, if you fail to forgive, bitterness and anger, though skillfully masked, can and will tarnish relationships. Married, divorced, separated or single, God can turn brokenness into an unbreakable force, but it is imperative that your mind is renewed by applying biblical principles, beginning with forgiveness.

Those who have walked in true forgiveness know that God restores. It’s been well stated that life makes us bitter or it makes us better—the choice is ours. Secondly, destructive strongholds, influences, and addictions must be dealt with. God can deliver those broken by a failed marriage, but in order for change to occur on the outside (for example, remarriage or restoration) it first must occur on the inside. Strongholds include bitterness, pride, lust, selfishness, substance abuse, toxic relationships, anger and physical abuse, to name a few. These destructive influences hinder the healing and rebuilding process. Healing begins with a commitment to work on those areas known to be detrimental to your spiritual health and the health of the relationship.

Our attitude should be one in which we surrender our entire lifestyle to God. I’ve spoken with many who admitted that alcohol or substance abuse ruined their relationship, but instead of surrendering the problem to God and breaking the addiction, they simply found someone else to tolerate their habit. Unfortunately, the problem soon surfaced again.

It’s little wonder that many go through life changing partners, careers or residency searching for someone or something that can never be found apart from the wholeness that a personal relationship with Christ brings. If this is you, I encourage you to stop wandering from relationship to relationship and allow God to rebuild and restore: “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of

the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Do you desire peace and joy again? Simply return to God: "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Full surrender provides fertile ground for joy and peace.

If you're like me, you may realize that many years of 'wandering' could have been avoided. Many, no doubt, had direction for their marriage, but because of selfishness, disobedience, disregard or a deaf ear to God's direction, it ended in divorce ... but God can rebuild and redeem your life.

Don't allow past brokenness to cause future pain. Regret and failure will linger as long as we let them. Scripture is very clear: We are to forget those things that are behind us and focus on those things ahead. You can't change where you've been, but you can change where you're going.

Shepherds from time to time would break the leg of a lamb that continually wandered from the flock and, thus, the shepherd's protection. The shepherd would then splint the broken leg and carry the lamb on his shoulders for weeks until the leg healed. As painful as this was for the lamb, it was necessary to protect it from being ravished by wolves or other predators. In time, through the broken and dependent relationship, the lamb learned to walk and to remain in the protective presence of his shepherd. This concept was well stated by David in Psalms 51:8, "That the bones You have broken may rejoice." And Isaiah reminds us, "All we like sheep have gone astray" (53:6). Ironically, many thank the Lord for using their divorce to bring them back to the Good Shepherd.

What will it take to bring you back? A deliberate decision to stay close to the Him can avoid unneeded pain and provide safety and protection; it's the first step in the rebuilding process.

Watch my sermon, "Lord, Remove My Guilt and Shame," on Vimeo.

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