

## Finding Peace after Divorce

“And the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” (Mark 10: 8-9)

Divorce happens to other people. Some of my friends divorced. Even my brothers were in second marriages. But that would never happen to me. My marriage vows included “until death do you part.” My husband and I attended church regularly, actively participating on committees and councils. We sacrificed to keep our three children in our church’s school. In my smugness, I felt we were a strong Christian family that was impenetrable.

Then after 30 years of marriage, my rose-colored lenses were broken; the effects of the devil had invaded my “perfect” world. The man I married and whole-heartedly trusted, the father of my three children, had broken the marriage vows. The devil had grabbed hold of us and brought a new level of sin into our marriage. The relationship God intended had been soiled. What was I to do?

I sought help from our pastor to confront my husband with my discovery. During the ensuing counseling sessions, Pastor focused on God’s Word from Ephesians: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ...each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (Ephesians 5: 25, 28, 33) God commanded me to respect my husband, but for years I hadn’t, and couldn’t understand why. As Pastor delved further into this passage, explaining what it meant to “love as Christ loved the church,” it became clear. The reason I did not respect my husband was that he had been verbally and emotionally abusing me for years. I had been conditioned to think I was wrong, it was my fault when we argued or things went wrong. Throughout our marriage, my husband was not following God’s command of sacrificial love, and I in return was not respecting him or submitting to him. The devil had a strong hold on us.

Even with these revelations, I still believed divorce was not an option. We spent countless hours in sessions with Pastor where more unfaithfulness, abuse, and lies were uncovered. The man I thought I knew had been lying to me for over 20 years. I was devastated. I felt worthless and dirty. How could I have been so blind and naïve? Our marriage had been a lie for so long, I didn’t know what was real and what wasn’t anymore.

After twelve months of counseling, it became obvious that my husband’s heart was hardened, possessed by Satan. But again, what was I to do? God hates divorce. Did that mean I was to remain in a loveless marriage without trust, and continue accepting the abuse? In my mind, if I divorced, I would be disobeying God. I didn’t want to disappoint my Lord.

With Pastor's guidance through God's Word, I was brought to the realization that while I am not without sin, it was my husband who had destroyed our marriage bond. He continued to create distrust and confusion. My loathing of his lies grew so strong that it became difficult to be in the same room with him. I accepted that the relationship God intended no longer existed and there are times when God permits divorce. But moving forward with the divorce, I still felt as if I was doing wrong in God's eyes. I stopped reading the Bible, even ceasing to pray. My church attendance dropped. I felt unworthy of God's love and forgiveness. I had disappointed Him; gone against His will, and was ashamed.

At church, I felt isolated, like I had a big scarlet "D" on my chest. I was no longer half of the "model" couple we once had seemed. People were uncomfortable around me and didn't know what to say to me. Looking back, I compare it to a funeral. With the death of a family member, the survivors can be comforted knowing their loved one is now in heaven. With divorce, the death of a marriage, it seems there are no words of comfort. However, a simple hug and the words, "I love you and I am praying for you," was all I needed to feel the love of my church family.

Thankfully, my family, Pastor, and church family didn't give up on me. They continually encouraged me to return to God's Word. When I did, I found peace in the passages: "I urge you, brothers, watch out for those who cause division and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned" (Romans 16:17); and "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character." (1 Corinthians 15:33) I realized that my unrepentant husband had become an evil influence in my life. By divorcing him, I removed myself from his influence and Satan's grip was loosened.

Once I removed myself from the abuse, through the Holy Spirit I was able to accept that while I am a sinner, I am also a child of God and he loves me unconditionally. He washed away MY sins and claims ME as an heir of heaven. Not because of anything I've done, but by his grace alone. Just as Jesus forgave the criminal on the cross and declared, "Today you will be with me in paradise," so God also forgives me, and as a believer he promises me a place with him in heaven one day.

God also commanded me to forgive my ex-husband. His Word says we must "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13) I know that God forgives me of all my sins, and I am his dear child. While I haven't forgotten the sins an earthly husband committed against his wife, I have accepted that Jesus' death on the cross paid for those sins, too. I pray that the Lord reaches his soul so that one day he repents and benefits from what Jesus has already done for him.

It is now four years since the divorce. I have learned that we cannot see into another's heart, but we can hear their words and see their actions. These can serve to indicate what is in their heart. We must trust God to guide us in what is right for our own unique situation, forgiving others as he forgives us. He may lead us, for our own protection, to remove ourselves from a marriage that has already been broken.

Only through continued reminders of God's grace and forgiveness from Bible study and prayer, I have been able to find peace once again. I remind myself daily that "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure." (Psalm 16:5) I know that God has a plan for me as he promises in Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

Written by Sherry Kupke-DeLaGarza

Reviewed by Professor-emeritus David Valleskey