

Prescriptions for the Heart

Struggling with the Question of Divorce

You may be familiar with the statistic that more than half of marriages end in divorce. There are varying factors as to why this happens. People get married too young or for the wrong reasons. Some people may truly love one another and feel that it is appropriate to get married, but later for one reason or another they end up convinced that divorce is their best choice due to their “irreconcilable differences.” This is sad because most differences really can be worked out, but it takes work and often the help of one or more professionals.

In Old Testament days, a divorce could be granted for almost any reason, because divorce was viewed as a property right of the husband. In the days of Moses, if a man’s wife became displeasing to him because he found something indecent about her, he could write her a certificate of divorce, give it to her, and send her from his house (see Deuteronomy 24).

Years later, Jesus Christ challenged this tradition when some Jewish leaders asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mark 10:2-9).¹

Is it not possible that the true nature of our “irreconcilable differences” is the hardness of our hearts? In other words, is it not possible that our differences can seem irreconcilable because we are unwilling to forgive each other or even to overlook weaknesses we have learned about through the years of being together?

Even such things as adultery, which are usually considered grounds for divorce, can be forgiven if one is willing to do so. Once when a woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus for His opinion on whether or not she should be executed by stoning, Jesus said, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). The Lord’s point was that while we may sometimes think ourselves more righteous than others, we’re all just sinners in the end, and therefore, before God, we stand on level ground, equally in need of forgiveness.

And how many times should people be willing to forgive? Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples asked Him, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus’ answer was interesting, “I tell you. Not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (see Matthew 18:21-22). His point, of course, was not to keep track, just to do it.

Walls between people are built brick by brick. One of the greatest tools in breaking down these walls is prayer. By acknowledging our own hardheartedness and asking God to forgive us, we receive the strength to forgive others. When marriage partners are willing to work on their differences, those differences often end up not seeming so irreconcilable.

Talk to your doctor. He or she can pray with you and for you. Your doctor can help you discern and address any underlying medical conditions, such as depression, that may be affecting your perspective. When such conditions exist, proper treatment and support can result in your being able to see much more clearly what is going on and to decide much more objectively what you really want.

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