

Should I Divorce My Husband For Adultery?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question:

This is from: "anonymous - just humiliated." "Can I get a divorce? I am still raw with pain with every desire..." Now hear this: "Can I get a divorce? I am still raw with pain..." but she has every desire and prays to forgive her husband of twenty-plus years for his adulterous affair with a young, beautiful woman, who he spent over \$8,000 on with traveling to at least five states including six cities, jewelry from Tiffany's, jackets, a new iWatch when it first was introduced to the market. It has been a little over two years ago since this young woman, angered by their breakup..." Her husband and this young lady broke up, so the young lady called the wife and introduced herself.... "...to me as his girlfriend." And revealed all this information, which her husband didn't deny. He confirmed it as true when she confronted him. "Reconciliation has been harder than anything, testing my faith as I go to God regularly to forgive him continually."

She says, "I face triggers." What does she mean? There are these triggers that set off anger and bitterness. What? New discoveries. Things that her husband didn't fully disclose. She's finding out as time goes on new information, new discoveries. Inconsistencies in the things that he has told her that reveal lies. "And the discovery that he referred to this girl as his ex-girlfriend, upgrading their foul, adulterous relationship as one as common as a courtship instead of referring to her as what she was, a mistress. I'm hurting badly with feelings of not feeling good enough." So she feels like a failure as a wife. "Anger that I wrestle in the flesh because I cherish my relationship with Jesus Christ. My journey actually has been smoother since I've discovered this two-plus years ago. But we still argue. He says he's repented, but I don't see how because I still feel disrespected in the way he views her. Like how he mentioned her to someone as his ex-girlfriend, and how he tells me I'm crazy for still wrestling with the problem. And like how he says he lives a sinless life now that he's repented. Like when he uses profanity in response to me badgering him about the past adulterous affair as if it's my fault. His lies he's told in the aftermath to cover up things she told me aren't recognized as sin by him because now that he's not committing adultery, he claims he's sinless."

She says, "I'm born again, and I'm always repenting, always seeking the Lord to purge me as He said He would. 'Every branch that abides in Him...' I'm never so satisfied with where I am that I call myself sinless. Am I set free? Yes. But now more than ever, I'm wrestling with anger and unforgiveness as they are triggered. I have really great days. I have good days, moderate days, and really, really bad days. I'm seeking the Lord and pouring out to Him through all this." Now she also sent a follow-up where she said this: "I'm so sorry concerning the message I just sent. Be it far from me to leave out my own fault too. I've been wrestling with both anger and horrible profanity. I'm repenting constantly for my angry outbursts about the affair and the marital neglect I experienced. And to be honest," she says, "he has many times sat quietly and listened to me. He has not been a monster toward me since about two months after the discovery of his adulterous affair. And I'm sorry I left those points out." She felt convicted.

Discussion:

So her first question is can I get a divorce? Now you recognize, she follows it up by saying "every desire in her prayer is to forgive her husband." So this is a woman that's torn. This is a woman who's trying to heal, but she says there's triggers. Like she finds some new information that he wasn't honest about. Or he seems to downplay it - say it's her sin, it's her fault. Why does she keep carrying on with this? What do you tell her? She says, "he tells me I'm crazy for still wrestling with the problem." I would say to her you're not crazy. I mean, clearly if you're a woman and your husband has been unfaithful and then in the aftermath of it, new information keeps coming out, lies get uncovered, your husband basically acts like now that he's repented it's over and you ought to just get over it. No, I would say that all those things are exactly going to keep the wound opening up afresh. What do you tell her? Let's start right there. Can I get a divorce? What do you tell her? I don't even think that she really wants one. But she's asking the question.

(from the room) I don't think that's something that you give strong response to right away because of the nature of it. She doesn't seem like she wants a divorce. The guy has been unfaithful. She's not going to just get over it. She seems to want to get over it. You don't have a quick answer for something like that. I can't think - even though I know what Scripture says about divorce and the grounds for divorce - she doesn't seem that she really wants to. What quick response can you give to that?

Tim: Well, she may want to know that she biblically can even though she doesn't want to so that it's kind of a weapon in her arsenal to leverage over the guy. I'm just saying that could be. But I mean, just from a purely biblical standpoint, (incomplete thought) Let me ask you this. If she divorced her husband, if she was in our church and she divorced her husband, should we say, well, she had biblical grounds? Would we say, well, we counseled her against it, but she did actually have biblical grounds? Would we say no? She can't? And there would be consequences if she did? Maybe some kind of disciplinary consequences.

Well, let me ask you this. If a woman has a husband who's unfaithful, he says he's repented. He doesn't go on in his sin. And she seems to really desire to forgive him, is there a cutoff point? Would you say that she has a right 25 years down the road to say you know what? My husband was unfaithful 25 years ago and I want out. I just got sick of this relationship and I've got a biblical out and I'm going to take it and use it now. Is that like a get out of jail free card? Seriously, the exception points that are made there in Matthew 5 and 19, if there's sexual immorality - except in the case of sexual immorality. Is there, whether we put a distinct amount of time on it or not, is there a time? When Jesus says except for sexual immorality, does He mean that well, if you have a spouse who's been sexually immoral, and once they've done that, you basically have a right to divorce them at any time? Or is there a timeline? Would we say there is a time that if enough time goes by, that it would be inappropriate? What say you?

Scripture. What Scripture has to do with what's right? What's loving? What's appropriate? What's God-like? What's Christ-like?

(from the room) Would 1 Corinthians 7:3-14 be applicable to this situation? (unintelligible)

Tim: Which verse specifically are you thinking is applicable?

(from the room) It's 1 Corinthians 7:13. "If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife."

Tim: But that situation doesn't necessarily bring in the sexual immorality. Whereas the Matthew texts do bring in that specific reality. Let me ask you this. Do you think that it's possible to forgive the husband and still divorce him? I hear no. I hear yes. Could you imagine a situation where forgiving him - which is good, appropriate, letting go of the bitterness that you feel, where it still would be necessary to divorce him? (unintelligible) I mean, what if your husband actually was involved in pedophilia or something and you've got kids. Is it possible to forgive him and yet recognize I've got to get out of this perhaps for my own safety or for the safety of the children? Perhaps that could be. That doesn't seem like this situation. And clearly it's a different situation when you have a spouse who's continuing in their sexual immorality. But when you have somebody that's committed it and then they're repentant... Now, I recognize we could wrestle with, well, is he sincere? Is he not sincere? But do you think that a Christian has an obligation to remain in the marriage if the spouse repents? Is it an obligation?

Open your Bibles to Matthew 19. You're already there. Look at 19:1, "Now when Jesus had finished these sayings He went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him and He healed them there. And Pharisees came up to Him and tested Him by asking 'is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' 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're no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?' He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another, commits adultery.'" So there is an exception there.

So okay, with the exception - now this is speaking of a man. It was a very man-dominated society then. But nevertheless, a woman divorces a husband because of sexual immorality. It seems like there's an exception there. There's an exception, but there certainly isn't a mandate. It's not commanded. Do we not feel that a Christian who forgives sin against themselves - that's very Christ-like. For her to forgive her husband - very Christ-like. Would we not agree with that? He's claiming to have repented. She says for the last two years - that's 24 months - she says for

22 months, things have actually gone fairly well. Now there's these triggers that keep opening it up, but once he came clean, she says, that things were pretty good. What do you tell her? She's got these triggers. She's got these difficulties. What could you tell her that would really help her?

(from the room) Do you think that telling her that love does not keep a record of wrongdoing, if she truly has forgiven him... for example, like you said, if we tell her that biblically she can divorce, is there a time limit? Well, let's say 25 years from now she wants to divorce.

Tim: Here's the thing. You can say that, but here's the problem. If you were married and your husband was the one who was unfaithful, and then as you're moving forward, you keep finding inconsistencies with his stories, and instead of calling the woman a "mistress," he's referring to her as an ex-girlfriend. And his lies keep coming back so that the wound keeps getting re-opened. You wouldn't be impervious to that. Your trust is destroyed. And the thing is inconsistencies in his stories keep coming up. And he keeps referring to the woman in terms (incomplete thought). What's that?

(from the room) What keeps bringing that issue up though?

Tim: Well, it's going to come up. I mean, it sounds like he's speaking to other people about it and it gets back to her ears that he's referring to her in terms that seem to lessen the severity of his sin. And then, can you imagine if you're wanting to talk, especially when there's inconsistencies and you've got questions, and when you ask about them and you get upset, he's telling you that you're the one who's wrong. You're just holding on to it. You're crazy. You're still wrestling with these things. Get over it. Listen, those things would be incredibly hurtful and wound opening events.

(from the room) It kind of reminds me of David in Psalm 55, some of the things he said there, that my companion stretched out his hand; he violated his covenant. And here this lady's marriage has been violated. And David felt like flying away from the situation, but ultimately cast his burden on the Lord. And I guess if she's determined to love her husband, all those reminders are a reminder ultimately to go back to Christ, to cast her burden on Him, and just plead for mercy and help from the Lord. And He's going to give that. And if it's getting better in these last two years, I would assume in five years, it's even going to be more bearable, better hopefully. Hopefully God would save her husband. If she's going to stay with him, what other option does she have but to rely on the Lord?

Tim: Yeah, one of the things I wrote down is to encourage her to not forget the power of prayer and laying hold on the Lord and asking for supernatural grace. But here's the thing, there are women who navigate these kinds of situations and they navigate it to the honor and glory of the Lord. But I think one of the things that you need to navigate it is you have to think right. And you have to think truth. And one of the things is to surround yourself with people who are going to bring you back to the truth all the time. And I think that's being in a good church, surrounding yourself with people that truly help you. There are people who don't help. There are people who

- even professing Christians and perhaps genuine Christians who give wrong advice, bad advice, and it's not helpful. It's not healing. You need to surround yourself with people who really are going to guide you into truth that is helpful, that will help you get across these hurdles. And they don't always need to be living people.

One of the reasons I grabbed "The Sympathy of Christ," by Octavius Winslow off my shelf is the sympathy of Christ. The reality is we have a sympathetic High Priest. This is one of the greatest books that I have on my shelf for suffering people. Because what it does is it takes you close to Christ. And it shows you His suffering and His sympathy for the suffering. Because the truth is that Jesus has been in a place where He suffered the rejection, He suffered the hurt, He's been there. And I think that's critical, but think right. Think right.

What we need to be called back to especially when we're suffering - (incomplete thought) I especially think about the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter. When they're dealing with people who are suffering, what did they do? They didn't say just get over it. You're crazy. They brought truth to appeal to the mind. That's what they did. They came in and they said look, we're not going to say your suffering isn't suffering. But, your suffering - it feels long, it feels hard - it's momentary. Fifty years from now, this sister will be with the Lord. She'll be in Paradise. Every tear will be wiped away. So we need to keep it in perspective. Momentary, light affliction is all that our suffering in this life is called. And it's going to give way, give place to an eternal weight of glory. But you think - you think. What truths does this woman [need?] Obviously, the truths of the cross. The truths of God's forgiveness of her. That's got to be the foundation. I'm forgiven. After what I've done, I'm forgiven. After what I've done to Him, I'm forgiven.

Another thing that is essential is coming back to the truth, God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Because you know what the temptation in trial is. The devil's right there to say, "Look, God's vacated. You're on your own. He's not helping you. He's silent. You're praying to Him? This isn't going away. He's not hearing you." And I know Charles Leiter has said that the Gardener is never so close as when He's pruning. And I've come across it somewhere else, maybe Matthew Henry, that the Refiner is never so close to the gold... You could speak to that. I mean, you put the silver and gold in the kiln. You're not far away when the gold's cooking in the kiln, and you're getting the impurities out. And that's the reality. What we have to be brought back to is this, that God is specifically ordering my suffering. We have to be confident in that. Otherwise, we have no foundation to stand on. We have to be able to say all things are indeed working together for my good. I have to believe in a God that is entirely in control of every nuance of my life, and that He's guiding. And that He is the God Who says He does not willingly afflict the sons of men. What does that mean? It's the idea that He doesn't from the heart. He doesn't because He's cruel. Now look, He's a God Who's just. But there's sensitivity with God. I mean, you definitely get the idea in Scripture, God does not need to have His arm twisted to show mercy. It seems more difficult for Him to mete out justice. But entirely consistent with His character, He must. But just the idea that He's not willing to afflict the sons of men. It's this idea that God is going to bring the suffering that's for our good.

I'd tell her you don't want to use your mouth like that with your husband. You don't want any profanity to come out. That's wrong. No matter what he's done, that's wrong. And she talks about the repenting that she does, but it really needs to be the kind of repenting where she eliminates that from her life totally. She needs that. There needs to be a real holiness being worked out there in the fear of God. There needs to be a cleansing. The tongue needs to be set in order. And she needs the grace. Just because her husband may be reopening the wound and triggers may come, that is no excuse for her to do that. I mean, we understand the circumstances and that it's really difficult. We're not saying it isn't difficult. It is. She's in an incredibly difficult situation. I mean, do you ladies have anything that you would add that you would tell her?

(from the room) I was just going to ask on a practical level. Is there a time when godly counsel is to go seek help from elders, from people in your church, to counsel the two of them together if he saying that he has repented and has turned from that, but there are signs that maybe that is not true. Is there a time when it's not just dealt with the two of them, they need to go out? Like within their body?

Tim: Yes, I mean, definitely counseling. Definitely whether that's pastoral counseling with the pastors or whether there's some kind of counseling with a counselor, if both of them can be involved, that's definitely a good place. My assumption in this is that you have a husband that's professing to have repented and he feels like now he's actually even reached some state of perfection or something. The feeling I get is he probably isn't a genuine Christian. Now, that still doesn't mean that there couldn't be some good things achieved if you can get them both into counseling. But that would be good if he's willing to do that.

But sometimes I guess we just have to recognize that a guy like this might not be willing. Without knowing the real details there, he might not be willing, or even if he was willing for a time to go, if he's not genuinely converted, difficult to know how much fruit there may be. Sometimes in these situations if you've got one that's converted and the other one it's pretty obvious they're not, you really have to focus in on the one that's saved to do the right thing. Because if the lost member, even if they're going to counseling, they just lack the equipment to handle this thing in a godly fashion. And perhaps they even need to be dealt with about their false profession. And the thing is if the Lord's in it, then yeah, you'll get wonderful fruit, because if God saves him, then the thing will really heal. But if the Lord isn't in it, dealing with him like that is probably going to chase him away from the counseling. And he will all the more quickly not want to be involved. Somebody had a hand up just now.

(from the room) I was just thinking that she might also still be dwelling on it because he did not confess - he got caught. So that could be something that she's still thinking about.

Tim: Yeah, she's going to play it over and over in her mind. And I'll guarantee, we view things as elders in the church like that. We take very much into consideration when sin is exposed - did they get caught? Or did they come and confess? So often when people get caught, then they

say, "Oh, I repent." Well, now it's very questionable. Now you got caught. You were forced to now play the part. So yes, I think any woman, that would be a big issue. That yeah, he didn't come and confess this to me. He got caught. And then the thing that it seems like she's bringing out - because we've seen this. We see this with sin. A person gets caught. Now they confess, but later it becomes discovered that they didn't confess everything. And now you confront them with the more. Well, now they confess it. And now they apparently repent of that. But you can understand if you're a wife, and it seems like he's repented, but new things keep coming up that it's very convenient he never mentioned. The thing you're looking for when somebody repents is you just lay it all out on the table so that there's nothing hidden, nothing more that's going to come out. It's just there it all is. I'm not hiding anything. Because yes, as soon as you've got the idea, he got caught and he's only admitting what he got caught for and we keep finding out there's more stuff that's hidden. That's one of the greatest indications that there is no genuine aspect to the repentance. It's all a put on.

(from the room) I also have a thought, in the first letter she talked a lot about his response and that at times still referring to her as ex-girlfriend and/or not disclosing everything, but in the next letter, she was like, it hasn't all been bad. There have been times where I have had him listen to my concerns. So it just made me think of when in 1 Peter it's talking about suffering and her desire to actually walk pleasing to the Lord in that manner. And in knowing her weaknesses, knowing that there's triggers, knowing that the devil's going to be right there to tempt her in those weaknesses, just what it says in 1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you." And then this part where it says, "be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world and after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace Who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever, amen." So it seems like she wants to fight against it and just trusting in those things and God's enabled her to fight against it and to humble herself before Him and to cast her anxieties on Him in this season. It seems like she recognizes that things are getting a little bit better. She's enduring and trusting more.

Tim: I'll tell you two other aspects of this that if she's rightly communicating it that are pretty good indicators that his repentance is not a godly repentance. He may have stepped away from this and he wants to preserve his marriage, but a good indication it's not godly repentance - two aspects that jump out at me is one, if a man sins against his wife that way, and he knows that calling that girl an ex-girlfriend just does not sit well with her, he should never do it again. Another thing that jumps out is that he would ever fault her for not getting over it. After what he's done, his approach should be one of shame, not fault-finding with her. So you can understand that those things would definitely reopen the wounds and be hurtful. But the thing is, you have to trust, yes, the wound keeps getting reopened, but the Lord's only going to let that wound be reopened as many times as is necessary. Never so often that it's cruel. Never so often as that

it's harmful. He's going to let it happen as many times as it's useful. And clearly, she's indicating that there are some things that do need to be dredged up out of her own life. But it's very difficult.

(from the room) If he continued to refer to the woman as an ex-girlfriend and continued in that disrespect to her as his wife, would we call her to continue to endure the struggle? Or do you think at that point, like it's an intentional harm towards her by her husband?

Tim: Well, I don't think it's grounds to try to get out of the marriage. I think she needs to fight for this marriage. And like I say, I think all the more she's able even with him reopening wounds, all the more she's able to forgive him, is all the more Christlike she comes across. And you know, the truth is that 1 Peter 3 reality of seeking to win him by her conduct. And I guarantee, her throwing a blast of profanity at him does not help. It doesn't help anything. It doesn't help her. It doesn't help heal it. It doesn't help him. In no way does it help anything. But if she navigates this thing with the help of God, with the grace of God - and that's like, after what James said, I have it here - don't underestimate the power of prayer.

Don't underestimate the thing that seems so impossible to let go of or to forgive or to get over, the Lord has helped His people to get over and past every one of those kinds of situations. And there is grace sufficient. And people who have experienced it can say at times, there is a supernatural help from God to forgive or to be able to cover over or to love.

I was just recently talking about the Wurmbrand book that was selling for a dollar, "Tortured for Christ." You know, when they were in those Romanian prisons, the more their captors beat them, the more love they felt for the jailers. It's the guy whipping them, with every stroke of the whip, they're feeling greater love for the guy whipping them. How is that? It's just plain supernatural. But God's in the business of helping His people, so you cast your cares on Him. There's a place to come: Lord, please, he keeps reopening the wound. You know that he is. You know this hurts, Lord. You don't expect it not to hurt. I need help. Lord, I need help. In my own strength, I cannot do this. You just cast yourself on Him. And the thing is He helps His people. He really does. There's help for her. And I think she's experiencing some of that help. But I think there's areas where there's still defilement in her own life that needs to be cleansed. She needs to control her tongue. And that doesn't seem like it's in place, not if she's letting loose with a flurry of profanity. Well, anything else?

(from the room) I would say to her to just exhaust every avenue of overcoming it with love and persistence in prayer with the Lord. Because the Lord will give you peace to left or right if you're in prayer about it. The fear of the Lord overcomes you and will convict you of the things spoken out of turn or if you made a frown when you're offended. The Lord will convict them right there. The sanctifying even in that suffering is good for the offended or the spouse. And also, in the care of the Lord, He will direct when the time is to move on. Because it won't be the Christian's desire to move on. But it will be the Lord's will.

Tim: Yeah, on that note. This is from the chapter, "The Emotion of Love in Christ." "How little do we know experimentally of the love of Christ in our souls dislodging slavish fear, a bondage spirit, unbelieving doubt, and so enlarging our hearts that we may run the way of the Lord's commandments. And the chiefest is to love. Bring your heart with its profoundest emptiness, its most startling discovery of sin, its lowest frame, its deepest sorrow, and sink it into the depths of the Savior's love. That infinite sea will flow over all, erase all, absorb all, and your soul shall swim and sport amid its gentle waves, exclaiming in your joy and transport, 'O the depths...!' The Lord direct your heart into the love of God. Just as it is hard, cold, fickle, sinful, sad, and sorrowful, Christ's love touching your hard heart will dissolve it. Touching your cold heart will warm it. Touching your sinful heart will purify it. Touching your sorrowful heart will soothe it. Touching your wandering heart will draw it back to Jesus. Only bring your heart to Christ's love. Believe in its existence, its reality, its fullness, its freeness. Believe that He loves you and just as love begets love, so the simple belief in the love of Jesus will inspire you with a reflected responsive affection and your soul like the chrysalis will burst from its captivity and gloom and soaring in life, liberty, and beauty will float in the sunbeams of God's full, free, and eternal love. And in a little while, will find itself in Heaven where all is love." And she should buy this book. Seriously. For people who are deeply suffering, like I say, Octavius Winslow. One of the greatest books - balm for the suffering soul.

Well, let's pray. Father, we pray that there might be help for some folks in the things that were said tonight. Lord, we pray that You'd use this in some people's lives for good, for Your glory, for healing, for salvation, for help. Lord, we pray that Your kindness, that this love that Octavius Winslow speaks about, oh, Lord, may we know more about it. Help us to know it and to swim in the depths of it. Help this sister, who, Lord, You've put her in the furnace. We pray that she would know the cleansing, purifying grace of God in the midst of those flames. Help her to endure. Help her to persevere. Help her to love her husband with the love that only You can give.