

DOES THE BIBLE SAY I CAN'T TAKE MY ABUSER TO COURT IN ORDER TO DIVORCE HIM IN 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-10?

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 178 of the Flying Free Podcast. I want to thank those of you who are regular listeners, and I want to welcome you if you're brand new to the podcast. I hope that you will find many golden nuggets that you can take away that will encourage you and support you on your journey.

If you have been a listener for a while and if you've ever had the thought, "Oh! I can think of one, two, three, maybe more people that really need to hear this," if you've ever had that thought, I'm going to tell you how you can make that happen. When you leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts, that actually indicates to them that they should show our podcast to more people, put it in front of more eyeballs and say, "Hey! Would you be interested in this podcast?" And so it's kind of a way of you helping to get the word out about this podcast. So leave a rating and review if you can. It just takes a couple of minutes. You can be totally anonymous. And we're so grateful to those of you who have already done that. We enjoy reading them.

I wanna actually share one of the reviews that just came in, because it was pretty amazing. And here's what she writes: *"I've been part of the Flying Higher program, which is sort of like a graduate program for Flying Free Sisterhood,"* (and she puts a little smiley face) *"and I still listen to these free podcasts that Natalie offers to everyone. I joined post-divorce, and my healing has been exponential. So if it is a cliché to say, 'life-changing,' I say, 'Oh well!'"*

Two friends and I joined the program almost a year and a half ago together, and it is so helpful to have a community going through this same learning, sort of like a study group in college, where the curriculum requires new things to be learned that stretch our traditional way of thinking. I would totally advise this, to really unpack what this ministry teaches, because the pursuit of truth and freedom is revolutionary within Christian circles. You need a small army to survive.

The thing that my friends and I consistently come back to is Natalie's assertion that we operate out of our own personal manuals, which do not usually serve us well. Other people operate out of a manual that says, "Christian women" should be a particular way, and we operate out of a manual that says other people should be more understanding toward

abuse survivors within the church. That only leads to further strife, because the manuals are drastically different. True freedom comes from throwing away the manuals. It involves changing our thinking, which, with this program's reinforcement, is highly possible!

This podcast has also been extremely helpful in helping my support system to understand abuse, but only IF they really want to learn. So be judicious with whom you share.

I did extensive counseling after nearly forty years in an abusive marriage and an oppressive Christian culture. But this ministry was an important augment to my healing. I thought I was trapped in my abusive marriage. Through counseling (and being absolutely desperate), I discovered that Jesus wanted me to leave the "sandbox" where I was constantly being pelted with sand. Thank you Flying Free Sisterhood and Natalie Hoffman for helping me to emotionally leave that sandbox following my physical departure and the courage to believe I could heal from what others did to break me. I know Jesus directed me here. I am so grateful to finally be up in the air and consistently pursuing my God-given directive to be a creature who is designed to fly free at sixty-three! And no, 'life-changing' is not cliché in this case — because it fits!"

I was so tickled when I read that. Thank you so much for leaving that review. So, so encouraging. Alright, we have a couple of questions I want to answer today, so let's listen to the first one.

LISTENER: Hi Natalie. I'm just wondering if you could do a podcast on 1 Corinthians chapter six and take that passage apart, as it's being used, probably not by just my husband, but many other husbands, to say that women aren't allowed to take their husbands to court, that this should be settled just between us and/or the church elders. So I don't really understand the logic of it, seeing as any other thing that you would do with a Christian, such as buy property or housing or whatever, needs to be taken through the court system. Plus, our marriage was initially done as the court gave us a marriage license, so therefore it should be used to be undone. But if you could just look into this, and I'm just interested in what your thoughts are on this. Thank you so much.

NATALIE: I think that you make a rational point here right off the bat. Civil government was set up for a reason, and is even recognized and endorsed in both the Old and New Testament if you look at Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. If we get a marriage certificate from our local governing authorities, then we also go to these same authorities to get a divorce certificate. This has nothing to do with taking a Christian brother to court.

It's important to not get too worked up when an abusive person or an abusive religious system attempts to gaslight you with these irrational arguments that they make up in their own brains that help them maintain power and control over you. They have an agenda — remember that. They have an invested interest in saying things that strike you as dumb on some level, and you think that they are bluffing you because they are bluffing you. They're hoping that you will buy into their universe, give their words credibility, and feel guilty if you go against their commands and desires. Yes, you can trust your common sense and your body on this. I've actually taught my kids to be suspicious of anyone who uses a Bible verse to tell them what to do or not to do. That is just so disrespectful to God and to the Bible, and it's not how we use the Bible. So if someone is doing that, if they are using the Bible in that way, either their relationship with Jesus is nonexistent or it's still in its infant stage, where there's this black and white rule for everything, and they're speaking out of their ignorance of what the Bible actually teaches as well as out of their shame.

God is the god of all truth, whether it's in the pages of the Bible or on the lips of a child. Truth is also pretty common sense, so if you're experiencing cognitive dissonance and confusion, that's probably because someone along the way has put a little rabbit turd lie in your glass of lemonade truth, and it just doesn't look or smell right. Now, I'm being a little bit sarcastic here, and maybe even slightly snarky, because, quite honestly, this makes me mad. Stop calling yourself a Christian pastor or a Christian husband or a Christian friend if you're going to be this disrespectful of the Bible and other human beings. It's such a blight on everything that Christ stood for, and it's because of this that the world no longer gives Christianity any credibility, and that's a pathetic state of affairs. We should be the very first ones in line to help the poor, seek justice for the disenfranchised, stand up for the weak and helpless, and fight for the rights of all people to have dignity and honor and freedom. But instead, we are quibbling over random Bible verses pulled out of context simply so that we can manipulate other people to do whatever we say they should do.

Anyway, rant over. Let's get back to the question, which is about whether or not it's okay for a wife to divorce her husband if the Bible says that we can't take another Christian to court. So 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 — let's just read that for a second here: "If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life? Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters..." (Notice that these are little matters — these are trivial cases it says, okay? Not big things. These are not murder cases.) "Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for

a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? I say this to shame you. (He's trying to shame them, okay?) Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead one brother takes another to court, and this in front of unbelievers. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you've been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters."

Now I read that, and I'm like, "Hmm. Are these verses saying that you can't divorce your abusive, unrepentant husband who's living like an unbeliever and chronically mistreating you?" To think that that is what these verses are communicating is so far-fetched, but it's just the kind of ridiculousness that a religious abuser would try to put forward in order to keep his abuse target under his thumb. It is gross. Are these verses saying that if someone defrauds you or ruins your business or takes your home away or maims your child or stalks you or rapes you that you can only take them to court and get justice if they say, "I'm not a Christian," but if they say the words, "I am a Christian," then you're out of luck? "Can't take a Christian to court — the Bible says so."

The Bible has a lot more to say about disputes and the law than just this passage. I believe what Paul is trying to say here, and is for some reason missing the mark for some people, is that true believers who authentically love one another and have each other's backs, if they are seeking to resolve a dispute, they should start first by resolving it amongst themselves. Doesn't that make sense? If we are true Christians who love each other, we're going to try to resolve our conflicts amongst ourselves. That's all Paul is saying, and he's annoyed. You can tell he's annoyed. If they want to truly live into what it means to be a Christian, this is one of the ways they can do that. But it's going to require both parties having a desire to live into love and generosity and freedom and forgiveness.

But Paul's point is that it's pretty pathetic that there are some among the Corinthians who just don't get it, kind of like some people today who just don't get it. They just don't want to love one another. They'd rather continue to cheat, lie, steal, and abuse, and do it to their brothers and sisters in Christ or their wives. Then it forces the victim to have to go to the secular courts for justice. And that reflects poorly on what Christianity supposedly stands for. What Paul is not saying is that victims can't get justice if their perps are self-proclaimed Christians.

Okay, let's listen to our next question.

LISTENER: Hi Natalie. My name is Beth, and I have a question. Do you ever address girl

friendships that are abusive? Please let me know. Thank you.

NATALIE: There are a million different directions we could go when we address the subject of abusive relationships. Now, I focus on abuse in Christian marriages, but that doesn't mean that I don't have experience with abusive friendships. In fact and also, as I've worked with hundreds of women more closely inside of my Flying Free education and coaching program, one of the common denominators that I see on a regular basis is that when a woman begins to wake up to the abuse in her marriage and starts to take care of herself and set healthy boundaries, she discovers in that process that she also has a few friends who are controlling and manipulative. And she might also discover that she has some family members who are controlling and manipulative as well. Now, how does she discover this? Because controlling, manipulative people, they hate boundaries. And they're going to fight against them. They don't respect other people's voices, they don't respect other people's opinions, they don't respect other people's personal space or boundaries.

And the reason that we didn't see this before in these relationships is because we were so skilled at habitually pleasing everyone around us and catering to their desires so that we didn't have to experience their anger or rejection. Or at least, we tried to avoid it. If we were unfortunate to have experienced it, we learned quickly what we could or could not do around that particular person. You know what I'm talking about. You know those relationships where you have to be really careful. You have to gauge the emotional climate of the other person, you feel like you're walking on eggshells, you're never sure if what you say or do is going to offend them at any given time. You have to smooth things over on a regular basis, you need to manage their emotions, you need to take the hits when they're dysregulated, you need to make sure that if they ask you to spend time with them that you do that in a timely fashion, or you'll hear about what a bad friend you are.

These are the relationships that drain you — the ones that are high-maintenance. The ones that expect you to give and give and give, and they give back very little in return. They want you to be a good listener, but they don't ask you how you're doing or what you're up to, but if they do do that, they will quickly turn whatever you say back into something about themselves, and then off you go again. You come home from spending time with people like this emotionally exhausted. Because you're all Christians, and maybe you're even in the same small group, you're required to stay in relationships with them, though. The only problem is, you are the one who has invested all of the emotional energy, and you're not getting very much encouragement or other positive benefits from that relationship.

So here's the good news. You don't have to break up with them. That's good news! You don't have to really do much of anything to get them to leave you. I'll tell you why in just a minute. The other good news... Or, I guess it's bad news depending on how you wanna look at it: When you get healthy, they're going to break up with you. Why? Because of the boundaries that you begin to establish as a healthy adult.

So I don't usually talk about my own situation, but I'm going to give you a little bit of insight into some things that I went through back when I was waking up to abuse and starting to assert myself and starting to really open my mouth and show up as the person that I was. So first of all, in one relationship, I stopped saying "yes" every time they wanted to get together. I had a bunch of kids, and I was homeschooling and I was running a business, but this person thought, or at least, it appeared to be this way, that she should have access to me whenever she wanted it. And so she would call me at random times when she was driving or when it was convenient for her to talk, and then she'd expect me to pick up the phone and just shoot the breeze with her, and I'm in the middle of a whole bunch of things. Now, when I stopped complying with that, and I just didn't pick up the phone anymore, she didn't want to be my friend anymore.

In another friendship, I stopped being quiet about things. So one friend and her family stayed with us, actually, for several weeks while their home was being built. She would spend her days on her phone or reading magazines while I cooked and homeschooled all of my kids as well as all of her kids and then cleaned up after everybody afterwards. My kids actually helped, because I had them in charge of certain chores. After the first week of this, I realized I was going to burn out really fast. And so I spoke up. It was very uncomfortable, but I spoke up and I requested that her family also take some of the responsibility — pull their weight. I assigned some responsibilities to her and to some of her bigger kids, and then I followed through with making sure that everyone, her kids and my kids, did their jobs for the day. Well, that didn't go over very well, and after a few weeks, they actually cut their time with us short, which I was actually very relieved by. But they yelled at me for controlling them, oddly enough, and then they left in kind of a huff.

By the way, this is actually a typical abusive tactic. And I'm not saying these people were abusers. I'm just saying this is a tactic. It's an abuse tactic for the abusive individual who's pulling this tactic to blame the victim for what the abusive individual did. So if this has happened to you and someone is accusing you of doing something that they just did to you, you don't need... It's natural to feel disoriented and shocked, and you feel guilty for some weird reason even though you didn't do anything. But you don't have to feel that way. Just understand that what they just did is revealed to you that they know full-well what they just did. And they cannot psychologically accept that they would

behave this way, so they're making you the scapegoat. A scapegoat in Bible times was literally a goat that they would put all the sins of the people onto, and then they would send the goat out of the camp. So that's what the word "scapegoat" means. So they're putting their sin or what they did wrong onto you and then rejecting you, and then they feel better. That's not how healthy relationships operate.

In another friendship, this friend expected me to financially and otherwise support her and her family. They had some financial needs and other needs, and I had been doing that for a long time. After things financially changed for me due to my pending divorce, I could no longer do that in the ways that I had been doing it before. I could do it in some different ways, but not the same ways, so she accused me of not being a good friend. This is after over twenty years of my giving of my time and my emotional energy to mentor, train, and support her and her family, and she never spoke to me again.

Another friend that I had been walking on eggshells around for years just texted me out of the blue (I think she might have been drunk, actually, because her text was very incoherent), and she accused me of being just like her narcissistic sister. And I had no idea what she was talking about. I texted back and I said, "What are you referring to?" And she never responded and she never talked to me again. To this day, I have no idea what she was referring to. The last time I had contact with her a couple months prior to that was when I took her out to dinner and gave her a gift to celebrate her divorce from a very wicked man. And that was the end of that friendship.

Another friend who did some work for my business out of her home had cheated on her timecard and then accused me of not being a good friend because I had a different opinion than she did about something. And she never talked to me again either. And another friend was upset when I filed for divorce, and so she never talked to me again either.

So all of these break-ups — those were the bigger ones that I have — they're in the forefront of my memory. I had other smaller, incidental ones, but these were friends that I really tried really hard to have friendships with, and yet they were difficult friendships for me, even when we were friends. They were emotionally draining relationships. Now, all of these break-ups happened during a very short span... It wasn't a short span of time — it was maybe a span of time of maybe a year or two. And they coincided with me waking up to abuse and then deciding I was no longer going to stay quiet and appease everyone and try to make everyone happy. I was no longer going to just go out of my way to be agreeable and bend over backwards to serve everybody and give people money and basically just do whatever it was that they expected me to do over two decades. Instead of me running after them and saying, "I'm so sorry. Can

we still be friends?" which is what I would have done prior to this, I just let them go. I let them go. I didn't try to chase after them. I didn't try to text them and write them emails and say, "Could you tell me more? Could we talk it out? Could we still be friends?"

Now, I would have been happy to be their friend if they had wanted to keep being my friend in spite of our disagreements or whatever they were. But they didn't want to be my friend anymore. They wanted to be the friend of a woman that I no longer was. But they did not want to be a friend of the woman that I actually was. And I, at that point, I guess I just wanted to be friends with me finally. For the first time in my life, I was like, "I just want to be friends with myself. I just want to have my own back. I just want to be supportive of who I am for a change, and then whoever else wants all in on that, let's go."

So I did lose those friends. But I didn't actually lose all my friends. I still had these friends from high school and college that were still... They had been my friends for life. And they still are my friends. They're the kind of friends who don't drain me. They've never drained me. They're the kind of friends that give me energy just being around them — they're so inspiring and motivating. And they just hold space for me and I hold space for them, and they're just beautiful friendships. They don't expect more of me than I can offer. They're just so easy to be around. It's pure pleasure. There's mutual love and support and respect. These are the kind of friends that we might only see once every few years now, but when we get together, it was like we were never apart. You know what I'm talking about, right?

So I started thinking about all of this in relation even to my family of origin, because they also cut me off right around the same time. I felt like I was... You know that movie "Inception"? I don't know if you've ever seen that. I rarely see a movie more than once — I think I've seen "Inception" four or five times. But in that movie, these people go into this dream mode, and then, when the dream starts falling apart, everything starts crashing in on them. That's kind of how I felt during this time in my life. Everything was literally crashing in on me. I was losing my church, I was losing my friends (or who I thought were my friends), I was losing my family, my dad died, I was going through my divorce, one of my older kids wouldn't talk to me anymore. It was just colossal losses, left and right.

So anyway, my family of origin cut me off right around the same time. What happened was my dad (who would never in a million years have cut anybody off — he just was not that kind of person — let alone his own daughter), he died, and this is four years ago that he died. And my mom and my sisters... I had just gotten remarried about six months prior to that, and my mom and my sisters did not include me in the funeral

preparations. They did not allow me to have a voice in anything. It was like I wasn't even part of the family. It hurt so bad. So after the funeral then, one of my sisters (I have two younger sisters) and her husband had some relatives over to their home and then to go golfing in honor of my dad, who was an avid golfer. And my ex-husband was invited to this thing but I wasn't. This was right directly following the funeral. So that was very, very painful for me.

And then things were very cool between myself and my family. I was still trying to figure out... I did not want to lose them. I was trying to figure out where my place was in the family. I started feeling like I didn't have a place. And then a year later, I was not invited to my nephew's wedding, the son of the same sister who had had this thing after the funeral. Now, even this year, I'm not invited to my niece's wedding, and that's the daughter of my other sister. So my sisters and my mother have not talked to me for three years now. Now last summer, my daughter got married, and we invited all of these people to my daughter's wedding, and at my daughter's wedding, my own mother would not look at me or talk to me when I went up to her to try to make contact. Well, she did answer a couple of questions I asked her, but she barked the answers. A couple of my kids saw the whole thing go down, and they were shocked.

Anyway, I have cried many times over these losses. I'm talking about it now on this podcast like it's no big deal — it's a huge deal to me. And if you've gone through anything like this, you know that it's so destructive to your psyche just on so many levels. I have mentally spun in circles, I have grieved, I've raged, I've imagined a million scenarios of revenge, but I've also imagined a million scenarios of loving reunion, which is what I, deep down inside, what I really, really would love. I have experienced every emotion in the book surrounding all of this. I've had coaching on it, I've done so much work around this in my own life. I no longer have a family of origin, because to belong in that particular family that I was born into, you have to believe what they believe about everything: about marriage, about God, about the end times (that's a big thing), about immigration, about politics, about racism, about abuse, about how to raise your kids, about divorce, and all the things. And I don't believe the same way that they believe about so many things. And I'm okay with having different beliefs.

My husband Tom and I, we don't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things. But we have total respect and honor for each other, and we don't need to agree with everything in order to have an amazing, honoring, respectful relationship. But they're not able to do that. It's just where they're at, okay? I'm not saying that they don't love me. I'm sure they do in their own way to the ability that they're able to. And I love them. But I will no longer pretend to be someone that I'm not so that they'll like me and approve of me. I can't do that anymore because again, just like with my friends, I'm not going to throw myself

under the bus anymore. I'm going to have my own back and be who I am.

I was thinking about my son-in-law, Josh, who just married my daughter last summer. He is an amazing young man, and I think of him like a son. I enjoy spending time with him. He's one of those easy people to hang out with. He doesn't make anyone fit into his mold. He just loves freely, he allows everyone to be who they are, he's a safe human being, he doesn't manipulate anybody, he doesn't have these expectations that they should agree with him on everything, he's not argumentative. He does have strong convictions about things, he's very mature, and he takes personal responsibility — he does not blame others for how he feels or what he believes. He is wise beyond his years. And then I think about some of these relatives of mine who don't want me around. And Josh wants me around. Josh loves me. And I love it!

I started thinking, "Why do I persevere and focus on all the people who don't like or who don't want me around?" I think about even before any of this happened. Did I enjoy being around those people who don't like to have me around? I don't know if I did. When I was around them, I often felt stupid; I felt like I was the ugly duckling; I felt unworthy; I felt like I was kind of boring compared to them; I wasn't as cool as they were; I didn't dress as cool; I was less-than. I felt like I had to work hard to be as pleasing as possible. I had to push down my own thoughts and ideas in order to agree with them. I had to laugh at their jokes and pretend that I was enjoying myself when I was just feeling so much shame. I felt like a fraud just so I could fit in. And I never fit in anyway. If I had to choose who to spend time with, I would have spent time with people like Josh. And I probably would not have spent time with the ones who didn't like me around anyways.

So what have I really lost? I lost a dream. I lost a dream of a family. I lost the family of my imagination, of what I wanted so badly to believe that it was. But the reality was that was not the reality. That was not the family that I had — it was the family I wanted. Now, if my definition of "family" is a safe haven of love and acceptance, it wasn't that. You can't lose what you never had.

Now, I can't control and you can't control what other people do. But we can build our own lives. We can choose our own friends and our own families. And for the remainder of my life on earth, I'm going to choose to spend the time that I have left with people who value spending time with me, people who hold space for others to be who they are. And I get it. I'm not everyone's cup of tea. I mean, those of you who are listening, you're probably listening because I am your cup of tea. And everyone who I am not their cup of tea, they turned me off a long time ago. That's kinda the nice thing about a podcast, right? But I'm not everyone's cup of tea, and I obviously wasn't theirs. And

that's okay. That's okay. We want to develop and spend time with the healthy relationships that are life-giving and that move us and inspire us toward being the best versions of ourselves possible.

Now I'm sharing more personally about my life in this episode because I want you to know that I know all the painful emotions that are involved in getting out from toxic relationships and environments. It is not a simple fix. It's complicated, it's messy, and it is riddled with pain — deep, deep, pain. And it's also transformative. Because we all only have the capacity as far as time and energy to intentionally invest in a few close relationships. And it's okay to invest in ones that will enrich your life and to detach from ones that tear your identity to shreds and leave you constantly scrambling to put the pieces of your heart back together again. So this is what I wish for you.

So yes, friendships with girlfriends can be abusive. Friendships with sisters and brothers can be abusive. Relationships with our moms, with our very own mothers, which in our culture is just anathema, right? In our culture, nobody likes to think that your relationship with your mom could be dysfunctional. We like to believe in the story that our mom is our best friend and that she's always going to have our back and that she's always going to love us and be there for us, but that is not the reality for so many people. I'm just one of millions of daughters who don't have that with their mother and who want it desperately. And honestly, I believe we all need it. We all need a mother like that.

But you know, God is our heavenly father, and He's also our mother. There are so many verses in the Bible where it's describing God in terms of being a mother, like a mother hen sheltering her chicks under her wings. He nourishes us; He protects us; He supports us. And I know we've thought about God as being our father for so long, but I think it's important that we think about God as our mother as well. He can come in and fill that empty mother-wound, or that empty mother-space where our mothers... We wanted our mothers to be there for us, and they just weren't able to because of their own trauma, because of their own brokenness and the ways that they were unhealed and maybe didn't ever get the help that they needed. So I think it's possible for us to hang onto our own identity and to live into it and to detach from those unhealthy relationships and still intentionally create feelings of love for those people even though they're no longer in our lives. And I'm still working on that. I'm just going to be honest with you, I'm not there yet, but I am intentionally working on that, and it's where I want to be. It's where I imagine my future self will finally land, and I'm looking forward to that. So let's keep doing this work together, okay? Alright. Until next time, fly free.