

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE?

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: I have here for you today Cindy Burrell, and we're going to talk about divorce and remarriage, if it's okay, and why people are stuck on this particular issue. Cindy, hi and welcome to the Flying Free podcast.

CINDY: Thank you. I'm honored to be here.

NATALIE: Cindy was sweet enough to give her time to do a workshop that she has developed that teaches abuse victims and survivors as well as people who want to help women who have been in abusive situations how to understand the whole divorce and remarriage issue. Because this is really, really important. I know for many women who wake up and find themselves in emotionally abusive relationships, then they're stuck with wondering what to do about that. They might try to continue to work things out, but it's really, really difficult, as you know, to work things out and make things better when you're dealing with an emotional or spiritual abuser. And so then some of them will begin to start thinking along the lines of separation and then ultimately divorce, but is that okay?

We are women of faith. We love Jesus with all of our hearts. And we have spent our lives wanting and desiring to obey Him, to bring Him honor and glory, and we are terrified that if we get divorced that we're not going to do that. And the other issue that is a real fear for people is that they are going to be rejected by their churches and by their friends that they are involved with in their religious circles, because divorce is seen as the cardinal sin, almost. It's almost like you can do anything, but if you get divorced, then you're done. Your Christian life is over. That's kind of how it feels.

CINDY: Yeah.

NATALIE: Have you noticed that? I mean, you obviously, you wrote a book about it. Why? Tell us a bit about your own journey and how you came to decide that this was important enough to be writing books about?

CINDY: That's a loaded question. In my journey, I went through all the same things that you described, the guilt and the shame. My people in my own family didn't support me

when I separated from my abusive husband. People didn't even want to know what I was going through. They didn't even ask me. People avoided me. It was probably the single loneliest season in my life. And of course before that time, before I dared to separate, my former husband actually told me as long as I didn't catch him in the act of adultery, he could treat me any way he wanted and there was nothing I could do about it. So that was the way I lived for years. And yet at the same time, as you know, as a woman of faith, you go "Well, I'm just going to be, I'm going to do all the right things. I'm going to be submissive. I'm going to pray. I'm going to be more gentle. I'm going to be more respectful. I'm going to give him whatever he wants. I'm going to be this godly woman." And surely one day he's going to wake up and thump himself on the forehead and say, "Wow, she's amazing. Why am I so mean to her?" And he's going to change his ways.

But now I know, I understand that there are truly wicked men who claim to be believers. These are what Jesus describes as wolves in sheep's clothing. They know how to present themselves as a sheep to the public, but these are wolves. They know what they're doing. Their actions are deliberate. The cruelty is a means of maintaining that power and that control over our lives. And so, no matter how godly you are, no matter how submissive you are, no matter how gracious and loving and patient and prayerful you are, all of that gives him power. That was the painful truth in my existence. And then to be saddled with the way you can't divorce him, you just have to believe that God's going to heal your marriage. He wants to restore it, and He's going to in time if you're faithful. And then to watch my life and the lives of my kids just descend into this pit of insanity. And then to come out of it, literally the Holy Spirit told me to leave, finally. I knew He had been telling me for so long "Something is wrong here. Something is seriously wrong here." And then I would dare to open up to my friends as you probably did and say, "This is what's going on in my marriage." And they say, "Well, is he hitting you?" And as soon as you say "No," that's the end of the conversation. "Oh, well you just have to, you need to figure it out." And it's that measure of denial and then being pushed back in by the people who claim to love me and claim to know God back into that relationship. And then I finally one day literally said, "What should I do, Lord?" in a desperate moment. And immediately, immediately the Spirit said to me, "You must leave." I was like, "Thank you." And I left.

Did that make it any easier? No. And you know what, it's like that. It's just the beginning of a whole new open-ended chapter where there's fear and there's confusion, there's uncertainty. You don't know what your life is going to hold. It was probably a point in my life where the Lord was more profoundly present in terms of providing comfort and validation and that sense of surety that no matter what anybody else thought or told me, I was walking in Him. But it's very lonely and it's very hard, and so much of it is

grounded in our inability to understand God's heart for marriage and for relationship. He does not condone abuse in marriage, and we see how He describes marriage in Ephesians five. There's no room for abuse there. "As Christ loved the church": that's inconsistent. And what I tell people is that marriage was never designed to provide a haven for sin. For us to accommodate sin in His sacred institution for however many months or years is tragic. And we are enabling sin and accommodating and we're teaching our children. We have children, and they're watching us and they will grow up to emulate us. That's the last thing we wanted.

And I want you to know that my journey to studying divorce came because even after my divorce was final and Doug and I married, I remember we went to a church one day and the pastor was all happy to greet us and meet us and we were new there. And when my husband mentioned our ministry and then he mentioned that we had both been divorced, suddenly the man's countenance literally changed. Yeah. It was like, "Ooh." And it felt like he couldn't extricate himself from us fast enough.

NATALIE: Wow.

CINDY: Yeah. I went home that afternoon and I cried and I told Doug, I said "I don't understand. I have absolute peace in the Lord, why are we condemned? Why are we judged?" And that was the moment that I was like "Something is not adding up. This does not add up in terms of God's heart." And then it's like, I began to pray about it and said I would find a little nugget in Scripture, and I would literally go to the Lord and go "Okay, this must be the reason I'm free, this must be it." And I would go and I would say, "Lord, is this why I'm free? And I'd hear the Spirit say, "Nope, that's not it." Okay. This went on literally for like, two years. I'm not kidding. And I remember one time I felt the Holy Spirit say "You're missing the point," but it wasn't more specific. And so I'm like, "Okay, I'm missing the point." I remember another time He said "Go deeper, go deeper." And it was so amazing, Natalie. Because one afternoon I was randomly driving and it was like the Spirit literally washed over me like a wave. And the Spirit said to me "It's always been about one thing," and I was like, "The one thing, one thing." And then I knew it was relationship. From the beginning of time until eternity God has always been about relationship. And then the Spirit said to me "You're free because I said so."

NATALIE: Wow. See, that is incredible, because Satan, he wants us to believe the exact opposite. That we are loved only if we, you know, fulfill certain requirements or are a certain way. And of course none of us can. And so we're always feeling like we don't measure up, and then he uses this kind of thing. Here we are in these relationships with a human being who is telling us the same message, really being used as a pawn of the enemy. And then we go to the Bible or to church and we're told that God feels the

same way about us. What a tragic lie. This drives a wedge between women who need the love of Jesus Christ more than anything else. And it causes them to believe that that love is not there for them. And Christians should be the liaisons between God's love and human beings. And yet for some reason, you know, what you experienced with that person in that church, that person was not being a conduit of God's love, was not being an ambassador of Jesus Christ in that moment at all. He was actually doing the exact opposite, causing you to feel rejection and having to go back. And thank goodness you were grounded enough yourself in knowing that God loved you, and you were listening to Him and hearing from Him. And He revealed that to you, because that was something that God said. That's the nail on the head: the love of Jesus Christ for the human race. And if there is something that's not reflecting that love and that tenderness and compassion, regardless of where you're at in your life, then it's not of Christ. It's something else.

CINDY: That's such a powerful point and I think what our failure, if I can call it that, is to listen to other voices or even to listen to the enemy's voice. And I've talked about other voices, meaning other people's voices and other spiritual voices, rather than really focusing on hearing the voice of God. Virtually every woman I've ever talked to or consulted with, the first words out of their mouth are generally "I'm so confused."

NATALIE: Yes.

CINDY: Confusion is not of God. So we always have to go back to "Where's the confusion coming from?" Because it's either a lack of information or a lie. It's rarely a lack of information and it's almost always a lie. We're being lied to.

NATALIE: And it's a lie mixed with truth.

CINDY: Yes.

NATALIE: That's why it's so confusing. It's kind of embedded in the truth and you can't find it all the time.

CINDY: Right. So you have to peel away the layers and say "Lord, what is really true?" And above all to really focus on what is the heart of God and ask Him. Go to God and stop listening to all the other voices or the guilt messages. And now when I read Scripture, I'll read something and I'll go "Something doesn't feel right about that" and I won't know what it was. And then I'll go searching for it, I'll pray about it, and the Lord will show me "This is my heart," because He is loving, He is gracious. He is all about relationship. We're the ones who tend to, like you mentioned, fall back on the what

we've been taught rather than Who we know.

NATALIE: Yeah, exactly.

CINDY: We need to go back to Who we know and let Him be the source of validation and encouragement and truth and empower us rather than living in that fog. That just holds us captive.

NATALIE: Yes. Okay, for those of you who are listening, Cindy just did a workshop within the Flying Free membership group where she went into great detail about divorce and remarriage with lots of Bible verses, and she systematically and strategically went through so that you could follow from the beginning to the very end and get it really clear in your mind, "What does the Bible actually teach?" Because we want to know. We've been told the Bible teaches divorce is a "no no" unless someone's committed adultery, and we've been told that if you get divorced, then you're an adulterer the rest of your life if you get remarried. So under that teaching, both Cindy and I are in perpetual adultery being divorced and remarried. But is that the case? So we need to know if that's really true or not. And this is where I mentioned a bit of lie mixed with the truth. What I've been learning is that a whole new world opens up when you start looking at the fact that Bible translations are not all equal and that translators are human beings. They're fallible, they have bias. And they've taken some words that were in the original Greek and Hebrew and they've translated those words. Instead of literally translating them, they made up their own words and tried to make it more... maybe in some cases just tried to make it more understandable. But in other cases, when you change the words, it actually shifts the meaning of the message that's actually being communicated. And that's what Cindy uncovered. And so, I'm sure you talk about this in your book. The book that's called "God is My Witness: Making a Case for Biblical Divorce." She talked about it in this workshop, but talk a bit about that, because people are going to want to know is... I mean, obviously we don't have time in this podcast to go into the details, but is there hope for women who are married and they're feeling like "I can't get out of my relationship if I want to please God"? You know, we're talking about the heart of God. Let's say that I, well, I do have a daughter. You have older children. Are any of your children daughters?

CINDY: Yes, two daughters.

NATALIE: Okay. So I have an 18 year old daughter right now. She's dating a really, really wonderful man. But if she ended up dating a guy who ended up abusing her... let's say she got married when she was 20 not really knowing, she has no life experience. She makes a dumb decision, gets married. Five years later, she's been emotionally abused.

She's got two kids, and she's not able to contact me. She's being isolated, and yet I would say, because I love her, she should be set free from that relationship. But some people would say "Well, it doesn't matter." God, Who we believe loves her even more than I do and cares about her future and cares about who she is as a human being, God says "Nope, she's got to stay," because she made this mistake when she walked down the aisle one day and said "I do" to somebody, and now she has to suffer and maybe even die of some disease or something because her immune system ends up getting shot because she's... I mean, you can just go all over the place with what the consequences of this marriage could be because she did that one day. That doesn't seem like love. And that was kind of the thing that I came to, was "This does not seem like who I know God to be." Is that who God is? I mean, is divorce okay and can you get remarried?

CINDY: Right. Well again, the literal translation makes it so much clearer. The first book I read on the subject was a little teeny tiny book. It's still available on Amazon, called "Divorce: a Gift of God's Love." It's written by pastor Walter Kellison, and it's a teeny little book. But in it he exposed the language and the difference between divorce and putting away a spouse, which was cruelty. And he said that the first appearance of the word divorce was in a 1611 version of the Bible. It only appeared in one location, and the rest of the time in the Scriptures the word that meant "to put away" was accurately translated "putting away" because there is such a profound difference between sending away a spouse without cause and without a writ and lawful for cause divorce. And he said, for whatever reason, after that the interpreters began replacing the word "put away" with the word "divorce." And my presumption is simply that that's what we could relate to in our culture. We don't have a term for "putting away" in our language and in our culture. So that was convenient but wholly inaccurate. And that is what has kept us bound to a legalistic view of God's heart. And that is not who He is. We're talking about legalism as opposed to relationship. God is not a legalist, He is a relational-list. Everything is about truth and mercy and justice and grace, and you don't find those things in an abusive marriage. That's bondage. God gave us a marriage of bond, it was never meant to be bondage.

NATALIE: That's good. I like that. I know one of the things that just opened my eyes was a couple years ago, I decided I was only going to read the Gospel of John over and over and over till I read it about twenty times. And every time I read it, at first it was kind of like, okay, I used to read through the Bible every year. So I've read that book a million times already, right? But I'd heard that if you read a book over and over and just focus on one book at a time, the Holy Spirit will show you these new insights that you maybe never saw before. And one of the biggest things that I saw during that time was the love of Jesus Christ for human beings, which brings us back to what you were saying earlier.

Jesus loved people. He loved people, and when the law got in the way of serving and providing provision for people, the law went out the window and the love came in. So He heals the man's hand on the Sabbath. He picks grain for food on the Sabbath, and that's when I realized, you know, it was the same message that He was giving to me that He gave to you. It was "I care about people and if you are my daughter, that's your job. Your job is not to hound on the law and to get people to obey the law. Your job is to love people and to serve people and to set them free."

CINDY: Right. And the law was designed to point people to God. It was designed to, yes, at times, remind us of our frailty and our weakness and our fallibility, but it always was designed to draw us back to God. Look at the Ten Commandments. You know, it's like the intent was "Honor Me first, put Me first and then live lives that are respectful of other people that give them honor. And no coveting, no lying, no adultery." It's like, yes, basic stuff, but all of it is about how to relate to Him, how to be with Him, putting Him first and then loving people, like you said. And keeping people in toxic and currently horrible abusive marriages does not honor God. There's no way around that. I agree when people say "Well, I'm staying to honor God." It's like, you know, I understand your desire, but you cannot choose for this other person in the relationship. If anything, we need to allow wicked people to reap what they sow. If they're ever going to change, we need to let them fall. Jesus said "You know a tree by its fruit." What kind of fruit is being grown in your household? If you're willing to look at that and say "What is happening here does not glorify God." I had a woman write to me once and share with me that her son, her teenage son came to her and said "Why are you staying with my father?" And she said "Because I believe God would be displeased with me if I left him." And her son said to her "I don't want to believe in a God that would make us live like this."

NATALIE: Wow, that's amazing.

CINDY: And she left. She finally divorced her abuser, because her son showed her that that was not consistent with the heart of God.

NATALIE: Right. Okay, so how would you answer someone then (and I'm sure you went through this) where they're okay with the idea of having their spouse reap what he's sowed, but they don't want to be the one that brings down the hammer of justice? So in other words, like I didn't want to separate from my husband because I didn't want to be the one to initiate. I wanted God to come down and do something to save me. You know? I didn't want to be the one that looked like the bad guy. So we were separated for a couple of years and then I finally, you know, then I had to file for divorce and take it a step further. And again, I did not want to do that. I was like "Why God, why do I have to be the one to initiate this? Why can't he just walk away or why can't someone else do

it? You know, why do I have to do it?" It puts an extra burden on the survivor, because not only does she then lose the marriage (because she really doesn't necessarily want to lose being married or anything) and she doesn't want to be single and struggling to make ends meet and raising kids by herself. And she also doesn't want everyone to hate her guts.

CINDY: Right.

NATALIE: So?

CINDY: The answer to that is that we have to be willing to stand on the truth. As painful and as uncomfortable, and the fact that other people may not understand, doesn't matter. Because when we choose to remain, as long as we choose to remain and as long as we choose to defer those decisions to our abuser, he won't make them. When you're dealing with an abuser, all of that gives him power. Our faith, our belief system, our convictions, and our determination to do the right thing actually gives them power. So we have to reclaim that as uncomfortable as it is. I mean, honestly, my former husband would've never left me. He would have never divorced me. He had a maid. He had a servant, he had a slave. He had this submissive woman with no backbone. Why would he give that up? He had it easy. You know, it wasn't pleasant for anybody, but he didn't care. So we have to be courageous. We have to be willing to be courageous and stand on the truth. And yeah, people judge me for that too. It's like "Cindy, you did this..."

I had my own sister once a couple of years after I divorced my husband, we sat down for coffee. We were having coffee one day and I was sharing with her some of my history and she was very strangely stoic. And then she said "I still don't see why you had to divorce the man." And I was like "Huh, conversation helper." But it was like, "No. I can't afford to care what you think about me." This is not about image. It's not even about my reputation. This was about truth and claiming my value, protecting my children, and reclaiming our lives. Saying, "We are not going to live in this godless, sick, insane environment any longer." And I told my kids, I said "We're going to break the cycle. It's going to be work. I have no idea what's coming. I have no idea whether we'll be able to stay in our house, I have no idea what my finances will look like." And it's a very hard journey. Was it worth it? Absolutely. I have told her "I wouldn't have ever regretted leaving or divorcing my abuser. My only regret was not doing it a whole lot sooner."

NATALIE: Exactly. Exactly. I feel the same way. And I have heard that from many, many people. And unfortunately it is the church and the religious ideas that we have that do

keep us in for so long, because we're just holding out hope. Well, I wanted to thank you so much for taking the time to visit with me. It's been so much fun getting to know you today. And for the rest of you who are listening or watching, I will put links to Cindy's website and to her books on. I'm assuming they are all on Amazon, is that correct?

CINDY: That's correct.

NATALIE: Okay. And she's got some excellent blog post articles. In fact, it was one of her most recent blog post articles that made me realize, "Oh, I got to get her on and introduce you to her and introduce her to you. And so she can talk about this subject. She did a recent blog post on the whole idea of divorce, so you can check that out too. That's it. Thank you so much, and I hope the rest of you guys have a great day and fly free.