

Likewise, arguments and ill temper and alcoholism or drug abuse or any of the other things that enter into the downfall of a marriage are only symptoms. Like the cold virus is the only real cause of colds, so also there is only one real cause of the disease of Divorce – SIN! It spells gloom and doom in a marriage. In fact, it spells gloom in life – period!

All sicknesses and diseases are caused by germs of one kind or other. Some are caused by bacteria (*plant organisms*), some by fungi, some by protozoa (*animal organisms*), some by viruses and some by combinations working together. Divorce, too, is a disease. Spreading like an epidemic, it is now even undermining the hopes for successful marriage of many who are not yet married. By providing an socially accepted “out”, it tends to encourage young people to enter into alliance with a mate they would probably have eliminated in courtship if they knew they would have to spend the rest of their lives together. “Oh, well, if we don’t hit it off, we’ll just get a divorce and try again,” is the attitude of many of today’s young people. Often their parents are divorced, and on the second or third try find an ideal and happy marriage. “Well, if that’s the case, why shouldn’t I approach it that way too?” Why not? I suggest that you get them aside and ask them in confidence whether they would follow the same path if they could roll back the clock and have the chance to relive their lives. Nine out of ten will tell you they would never repeat the mistakes nor marry the person they are divorced from if only they could go back. The years of unhappiness, the bitter memories, the pain they saw their children go through could have been avoided if only – ! If only they had waited and chosen the right mate in the first place. Most of them will also admit that even with the poor choice they did make, the marriage could have been a whole lot happier if both of them had determined that each was going to do everything possible to be the best husband or wife they could be. Tracked to its root, it was that old Self Interest Nearest heart that was where the problem started.

Who can deny that selfishness is the underlying cause of drinking? Of adultery? Of nagging? Of neglecting to live up to the duties and responsibilities of marriage? Of lying to the spouse? of being temperamental? You name another problem and then stop a minute and think about it. Can it not be safely said that self-centeredness is the real basis for that problem?

Maybe you aren’t the one who is selfish. Maybe YOU are a true born-again Christian whose life is dedicated to the will of the Lord and it is your mate who is selfish. Once you recognize this

CHAPTER SEVEN

CAN A “MARRIAGE ON THE ROCKS” BE SAVED?

DEFINITELY YES, but it will not be easy. Is it worth the effort? Probably, but each case must rest on its own merits. In this chapter we will deal with the situation that has become serious and there is talk of divorce or separation, or even one in which a separation or divorce has already taken place, but before either has remarried or begun to live as a common-law spouse with someone else. (If either has begun to live with another person in a male/female relationship resembling marriage which could result in “common-law” marriage, (see Chapter 8, May A Divorcee Remarry?).

In some cases, the marriage can be “preserved” or “saved” but the price will be beatings, physical or verbal abuse and the “to death us do part” has far too often been death at the hands of the abusive spouse or in self defense by the abused spouse or one of their children.²

Please analyze your situation carefully, if you have such a situation. As unbelievable as it seems, there have been cases in which the godly Christian spouse has endured the abuse and the abuser has been converted and become a beautiful Christian and the marriage has been converted from a real disaster into a delight. I would like to tell you that this happens often, but for every time that the patient and enduring spouse wins and the marriage is really saved, there are probably two or three in which one or the other spouse is actually killed by the mate, and there are probably more abusive parents killed by one of their children than ever change and become good spouses and parents. In the vast majority of cases, the abusive person never makes any serious change in his or her life and live with their problem until they die. So, unfortunately, I must cautiously say that it may be best to at least separate, especially if you have children that are being abused, even if you do not go the route of a full divorce.

There have been a fair number of cases in which the shock of losing the wife or husband or whole family through separation has brought the abusive spouse to his or her senses and they have either sought counselling, gotten right with God, or made a firm enough determination to “straighten out their act” and the couple has been able to successfully reunite and go on from that point to have a good, if not fully delightful marriage.

² See page 59, paragraph 1.

But you need not give up hope. Even if you go the full route and divorce, or you get a restraining order to prevent the abusive spouse from coming and attacking you in your new home, and all *seems* hopeless, you can still pray and believe God for a miracle. And a real miracle is what this disaster requires! Please believe me when I say that this is really a situation in which “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you,” (*Matthew 6:33*), is probably the best advice that can be given. As you begin to walk in faith and trust God, not leaning to your own understanding, but relying completely on Him in faith believing, He will work on the errant one to bring conviction and salvation and the resulting new life in Jesus Christ can completely change that abusive spouse into a repentant, tender, loving one who is a joy to be with. Your marriage can become a delight.

But even as God’s desire is that all men everywhere repent (*See 2 Peter 3:9; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4*). He has given mankind the freedom to choose either to do good or evil, and while He will answer your prayer and put all kinds of stumbling blocks and chances in the way of the abusive or drunkard or drug abusing or unfaithful spouse, He will never outright overrule their own self-will. So, if after you have cried and prayed before God for the errant spouse, never get angry with God if the spouse does not get right and come back. God did not fail you. He will provide some other kind of relief for you. It may or may not be in the form of another person to replace the one lost. It might just be in caring for other people’s children or caring for sick or invalid or old persons or in a job you really enjoy, or it may just be in the form of an inner peace about your situation after you have completely and wholeheartedly given control of your life to the Lord.

We have dealt with the most serious situation first, but many divorces and marriage disasters do not involve actual abuse and even ministers and Christian wives have problems which sometimes end in disaster if they don’t work at preserving the first love and delight they knew when they first said, “I do.” In fact, ministers and doctors and others who deal with trying to help other people often fall victim to marital disaster because they get so caught up with trying to help people other than their own spouse is neglected. Often, they assume that their spouse understands and is in wholehearted accord with what they are doing and don’t even realize until they are faced with a note under the magnet on the refrigerator door, saying, “Dear _____, I’m sorry, but I couldn’t take it any more, and I’ve gone _____.” We just haven’t been

making it lately. Love, _____.” It may be back home or it may be to a new love or just to a new apartment alone and away from the too busy spouse.

The answer here is to communicate. Don’t allow embarrassment, pride, shame, guilt, or anything else keep you from first communicating your love for your spouse, and then anything that is causing or could cause a problem between the two of you. whether it is his loud snoring, her always putting away the papers you needed to fill out and mail today so you can’t find them, a drug or alcohol or infidelity problem, or whatever.

In the Bible, infidelity was taken as a very serious matter worthy of death, (although usually enforced more against the woman than the man, simply because she was much more likely to get caught!). Our society in general, no longer sees adultery as anywhere near that serious, and in fact, experimentation, unfaithfulness and promiscuity are openly endorsed on many television movies in our own homes today! Many mistakenly use the argument that Jesus forgave the woman taken in the act of adultery (*John 8:4-11*) as an indication that God no longer views sexual sins as seriously as He did in the Old Testament. But this is not true. He was simply pointing to the hypocritical way it was being enforced in the case before Him. He told the woman that because her accusers were gone, He did not condemn her, but for her to “...go and sin no more.” There are many good medical and scientific reasons why it is better for one man and one woman to have sex only with each other in a marriage bond, but apart from being a demonstration of discontent or an inability to overcome temptation, or the errant spouse catching a sexually transmitted disease or the wife becoming pregnant by the person she commits adultery with, the actual act of intercourse does not alter the genital organs of the guilty person nor their ability to return to being a faithful spouse if the innocent spouse is willing to forgive and forget to save the remains of the marriage.

Volumes and volumes have been written on the subject of how to go about saving a marriage on the rocks, yet the fact is that this could be the shortest chapter in this book. For centuries, men have tried to rationalize and explain away their marital difficulties. the blame is put everywhere but where it should be: YOU!

You could get chilled or overheated a thousand times and never catch a cold if it weren’t for the cold virus. The temperature of your body as affected by your environment is not the real cause of the disease, but only an environmental hazard.

What if you discover your spouse is practicing homosexuality? First of all, do not be misled by the propaganda put out by their people that some people “were born that way.” If you ask the question so they don’t suspect what you are getting at, you will not find a single practicing homosexual anywhere who is not that way because someone recruited him or her and used any slight difference, such as a nearly hairless man or a hairy woman or a man with a high pitched voice or a woman with a deep voice as a tool to convince him or her that really they should have been the other sex. This is nothing but a phony argument from the pit of hell. Don’t believe it for a minute! Homosexuality is a combination of a learned aberrant sex appetite and, if practiced, soon leads to demon possession which then cannot be corrected by any doctor or psychiatrist, psychologist or program. It can then ONLY be broken by the power of Almighty God.

Because of the likelihood of the homosexual contracting AIDS or some other STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease), the spouse is justified in that case to immediately halt marital relations with the homosexual and to begin earnest prayer and to seek the guidance of a Godly minister or marital counsellor. God still works miracles if we will believe Him for them, but short of a miracle, that marriage is already dead and may as well be buried.

fact, you have a valuable key to HELP your mate to adjust. Now it becomes your Christian responsibility to point out prayerfully, thoughtfully, and tactfully, in words and actions properly timed and directed of the Holy Spirit, giving all consideration to your mate’s feelings, the ways in which he or she could improve the marriage relationship -- a POSITIVE approach. Never imply that you are complaining about a fault, but that this is something that could improve the marriage. (Surprise! Bet it was YOUR selfishness that was causing the trouble, to hear your mate’s side of the story!) As you begin improving the lines of communication with your mate, keep your ears attuned to hear your own faults bared, and your heart tender to respond in love to correct any of your own faults you discover. In this way, you will accomplish much improvement in your marriage relationship.

Now let’s look at the possibility of salvaging Tom and Cathy’s marriage.* Let’s say that after the first couple of days, Cathy seeks out her pastor, Sunday School teacher or other Christian counsellor and seeks their advice. After a little probing, the counsellor discovers the breakfast table incident and takes Cathy to task. Seeing that by her lack of concern for Tom, and her own self-seeking, she is driving him away from her, she goes home and prepares the steak dinner he loves so much and awaits him at the door that evening.

“Hi, Sweetheart, I’m glad you’re home so I can let you know I’ve come to realize what a heel I’ve been the last few days,” she greets cheerily, giving him a kiss. She takes his briefcase and topcoat and whisks them away to their proper place. Then she leads the way to the dinner table where all is the peak of readiness. After they have been eating for a few moments, she again broaches the subject of their recent argument.

“Tom, I’ve been giving a lot of thought to the way I’ve been acting the last few days, and I see how very self centered I’ve been. I wasn’t trying very hard to understand you and the problems you were going through. I can see now that I haven’t been quite the ideal wife or as loving as I should have been for some time now. But Tom, dear, I DO love you, and I’m sorry for the way I’ve been acting. Will you forgive me?”

Now Cathy has put the shoe on Tom’s foot, and if his marriage and Karen mean anything at all to him, he will have to forgive and the little thing with Shirley will vanish. But if Tom is too selfish to forgive Cathy, the fault lies with him. If the matter is resolved by this effort on Cathy’s part, she will be wise never to

* See Chapter 5, page 36.

mention her trip to the counsellor, since Tom may resent having the problem aired. But if he refuses to forgive in a few days, it may be wise for Cathy to urge Tom to see the counsellor himself.

There are many advantages in good counselling, but there are also pitfalls. One must always remember that any counsellor comes into the problem as a relative stranger to the inner self of either the husband or the wife and so can speak only within the realm of his or her own experience and training. For this reason, I urge both husband and wife to make a real effort to UNDERSTAND the other and to avoid discussing their differences with anyone but the Lord. Only when one or the other finds the mate to be beyond their own ability to understand, should they discuss the problem with someone with the qualifications for giving wise counsel. Do NOT go to your next door neighbor or just anyone who happens to be handy to unload on. Go only to someone whose good judgement you know you can trust. If you have doubts about your counsellor's qualifications (not necessarily diplomas from universities), STOP! Be he (or she) a minister, doctor, psychiatrist or your best friend, if his (or her) own life does not demonstrate his (or her) counsel, watch out! But while the advice of a qualified counsellor may well prove very helpful, there is a Counsellor whose advice has never been wrong, and whose abiding presence in a person's life can guide that person through every thought, word and action. That Counsellor is – the Lord Jesus Christ. While every marriage may not be saved by turning to Christ, a true love for Him and your surrender of self-will to His will offers the best possible chance. The problem here is when only one marriage partner takes Christ into his (or her) heart and the other refuses Christ. When this happens, the problem really comes into focus, and will either result in the non-Christian becoming ashamed of his way of living and follow the example of his (or her) mate, or else become angered by seeing how far from an ideal life he's been living. In this case, conditions may well worsen for a while, but "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose." (*Romans 8:28*). Either the erring mate will turn from his (or her) self-indulgence to Christ or at least to his (or her) mate or else the break will become clear and final. I will not try to say that in every case the marriage will be spared by one of the partners taking Christ as Savior and Lord, but if BOTH put Christ ahead of self, there is little likelihood that either will have any big problem with learning to love and understand the other. Why don't you let Him have a chance in your life? Will it work? What have you to lose by trying?

Satan knows that the most sure way to keep YOU on his side is to keep you asserting your rights, demanding everything YOU want, and unhappy because you don't have more than you do. He will do all he can to make you proud of yourself and your own accomplishments and your possessions. If you will take note, you will see that pride is a form of self-esteeming self-indulgence and has caused more fights and wars than anything else. It is also the cause of a great many of our heartaches and divorces. Want to be free? Try asking Jesus Christ to run your life hereafter.

You say the example of Tom and Cathy wasn't a serious case of a marriage on the rocks? Perhaps not, but no matter how bitter and long the arguments and fighting have been going on, and how much hatred has been generated, the most sure and secure method of finding a lasting happiness is to turn to Him who is Happiness Personified – Jesus Christ.

So you took Christ as your Savior and Guide, and now your drunken husband is accusing you of an affair. You know you are not guilty. You begin to get a panicky feeling. But if you have prayed and placed yourself so that the Holy Spirit can guide you, you will have the best chance possible to always say and do the right thing to overcome. Then, if there is any spark of real love, any possibility of reconciliation, you may be able to get him (or her) to kneel with you in reverence before God to ask His guidance in your marriage from now on.

If the guilt is equal, or you now recognize that the problem was largely caused by your own self-indulgence and selfishness, consider whether you are going to be able to change yourself into a selfless individual. When you have tried and failed, kindly allow me to refer you to Him who is UNselfishness Personified. He's the Lord Jesus Christ. Though you can't see Him with your natural eyes, He wants to walk with you and talk with you and guide you through every one of life's problems. As you talk to Him in prayer, as though talking on a face to face basis with your dearest and best friend (who will never tell your secrets!), He will lead you in safe, sure paths.

The ONLY REAL WAY to a lasting reconciliation and a happy, delightful marriage is a Christ-centered life. Best of all, it's free! All you have to do is believe the message of salvation and let the Holy Spirit convict and convince you of your sin, then, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (*Acts 2:38*).

