

## The Alternative to Divorce

by Jan Ord

“I’m in love with someone else.”

Here in DuPage County, twenty-five miles west of Chicago, half the marriages end in divorce, and the national figure is not far behind. So these words are being heard by more and more married people. If your spouse told you he or she was in love with another, how would you respond? Is divorce the only solution? Or can we, as Christians, see this situation as a positive challenge to the marriage?

I talked with a distressed man today who is in love with another woman, as well as his wife. He is puzzled as to why this has happened. As members of a Christian fellowship, all three are good friends. His marriage is basically a happy one. But a friendship has developed in which he and the woman will talk for hours on the phone in a way that they cannot communicate with their spouses. Now they feel that they are “in love.”

Recently, they have discussed breaking up their own marriages, so that they can be together, but they know adultery is a sin (Rom. 13:9-11) and that, while God forgives sin, for them divorce is out of the question. God says, “*I hate divorce*” (Mal. 2:16), yet “*because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives: but from the beginning it has not been this way*” (Matt. 19:7-9). They see God’s purpose in allowing this situation as a positive experience to teach them love for others. Now they are settled, knowing their marriages are permanent relationships.

The strange part is that he has told his wife about the situation, and because she loves him she has chosen to take positive action by comforting and encouraging him when he is driven to despair by his emotions. Now she is doing everything possible to express her love for him. She has lost weight, has a new hairdo, dresses better, and lovingly responds to him in every way she can. Her home is a delight to be in, and she is a delight to be with. She could just as easily have taken a negative stand and demanded a divorce out of hurt pride, but instead she has taken a positive stand and is “seeing through” a potentially disastrous situation to a better marriage.

I have thought about my own marriage and divorce, and now realize that I took the negative approach. When my husband became interested in another woman I took it as an insult. I didn’t ask myself what was wrong with my attitude toward him, or ask him to tell me why he felt the need to do this. I saw the problem as all his. My reaction was, “You made a commitment to me and our marriage and you have to stick to that commitment.” I made a law for him demanding that he love me. Feeling guilty, he responded by trying. He gave up his infatuation, and tried to love me. I was hurt and angry. I watched as he tried to love me, but I refused to respond. He would have to court me. It never occurred to me that perhaps I needed to do the courting. I punished him for his “slip” by being cold. Finally, he gave up trying and we just drifted along.

Then he met someone else. Same situation. Again he got over the infatuation, and tried to make our marriage work. Again he wanted me to respond out of love, not duty. But I waited for him to be loving to me and then I would love him. Grudgingly I accepted him, “I’ll accept your slip, but don’t expect me to forgive you until you acknowledge what a terrible husband you are.” I created a climate of hostility, and made him feel ashamed of himself, and it reaped its own reward (Prov. 12:4). He couldn’t do anything right. He gritted his teeth, and told the Lord he was waiting for Him to change his heart.

I now see that “waiting for Christ to change his heart” may have been Christ waiting on me to act— so that *Christ in me* could change my husband’s heart. We waited for the

manifestation of his prayer. Yet I knew that God required faith first. He did not shine a light on the path, but expected me to take that first step into the darkness, trusting Him.

Because God did not instantly make my husband love me, my negative believing reaped a negative result. My husband felt forced to seek love elsewhere, and so he turned his back on me completely. Finally he saw that it was a false love and that true fulfilling love is a gift from God. But my opportunity had passed. He was no longer able to see God's gift of love in me.

Had I been a wise wife I would have "opened my mouth with wisdom, and . . . kindness" (Prov. 31:26), and respected and loved him (Eph. 5:33) instead of resenting him. All through those years I was confronted with the Scripture, "The foolish woman pulls down her house with her hands" (Prov. 14:1), but while I knew the truth of it academically, I did not *understand* the meaning of this verse.

Now I know that I can choose to see through a situation to either a positive or negative outcome. If I see through negatively, then I am a "pot" that just lets things happen to me. But if I see through positively, then I see myself as a person who "*takes up my Cross*" and walks into the situation as an expression of Christ. My attitude toward my husband was, "If you want a sweetheart, go and find one. I won't stand in your way. I'll be glad to be off the hook, because I won't love you unless you love me first." I didn't want to love him without a guarantee of his love for me first.

The wife I mentioned earlier took the opposite approach. "What can I do that will be positive in our relationship? Can I turn this into a constructive experience?" Instead of accusing him of a lack *in him* as the cause of the "love" outside the marriage, she sees the possibility of a lack in *her* as the cause.

Often, if we are willing to remove the "mote" from our own eyes (Matt. 7:3) the other person will then willingly search his heart and turn from his own selfish ways. True love is giving to give—expecting and demanding nothing in return—and it draws others to respond to the light and love that we are.

She reacted with love and perseverance. I, in contrast, reacted angrily and gave up. I thought that "Christ in me" meant He would make all my choices and decisions when I was tempted. Now I know that when tempted to be angry or to give up, I can call on Him to strengthen my choice so that it is the positive one. Unless I recognize this, my feelings rule and disaster results.

Is there then a positive constructive response to your spouse's infatuation? Yes. When we see through negative situations to God working in them for good, we should expect to see through to a positive result. If you find yourself in a difficult marriage relationship where divorce seems the only alternative, why not ask if there isn't a totally different result possible if you truly are the "Lover" in your form. Don't just assume that God requires you to walk the extremely negative route of a broken marriage. He in you can just as easily walk the positive route of renewed love to a relationship that is open and honest and mutually fulfilling.