

Endless Love

THE PRESERVATION AND
RESTORATION OF LOVE
AND FAMILY
THROUGH SCRIPTURE



By
Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son,
That whosoever believes in Him should
Not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

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“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”

Proverbs 23:23

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About the Author and this Book

The author is a bankruptcy attorney in Dallas, Texas, where he has resided since 1979. He is married and the father of four. After graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1983, he returned to the practice of law, not having received God's call to a different ministry. He is an ardent student of scripture and has been so since completing seminary. He is an evangelist and an author. He publishes his works without charge on BIBLEBOOKS.CO (Proverbs 23:23) and publishes a website that argues for creation ex nihilo from the perspective of design in nature. That website is located at CREATIONDESIGN.ORG.



Although we become righteous in Christ simply by coming to the Cross,¹ there is a lifetime between the day we trust Him and the day we meet Him face to face. It is here, in this lifetime, that the dynamics of scripture, especially two particular scriptures, make themselves known: either for good or for ill—our choice.

Criticism, unforgiveness and defensiveness kill families. To prevent it or reverse it, one must understand how they do what they do and how to stop them.

This work would not have been possible without the help and unwaivering encouragement of my wife, Mary Chesnutt.

Charles Chesnutt
Dallas, Texas December 14, 2016

1. Romans 3:22 "...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe."

The Purpose of this Book

This book is directed toward the Christian biblical marriage, which is the union of a man and a woman through a formal ceremony of marriage wherein the parties make lifetime commitments to each other.

The core and purpose of this book is to reveal the mechanics of how the sins of criticism and unforgiveness kill love silently.

Although other relational sins, such as adultery, may kill love as well, this is not a book about other sins. The theology set forth in this book may well apply to other sins as well, but those sins are not specifically addressed here. This book is about unforgiveness and criticism, how those two sins do what they do and how their effects can be reversed.

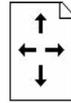
It is a study of how obedience to scripture by both parties can re-ignite deep, passionate, peaceful and powerful true romantic human love and how the precipitous, steady, seemingly irreversible death of love and decent to divorce can be reversed *overnight*.

This book may be downloaded for free at biblebooks.co.

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Chapter 1

Knowing God

HOW TO KNOW GOD AND
EXPERIENCE HIS PEACE

Knowing God is the key to love because God *is* love.¹ Knowing God is the key to life because knowing God is eternal life.² Therefore, knowing God is the key to life and love.

But simply being aware of these truths is insufficient. They must be experienced to be known and they are best experienced when we understand them. The Bible explains them and tells how we can acquire them. Therefore the key to life and love is scripture.

Scripture is dynamic. It changes us. The Truth of scripture never changes,³ but its effect on us changes whenever we make a decision to obey it or disobey it. Like the pieces on a chessboard, everything changes as soon as we make a move. We move a piece on the scriptural chessboard each time we make a moral decision. Each moral decision—and we cannot avoid them—has a spiritual and ultimately a material effect because each move is either in harmony with Truth or it is not.

1. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

2. John 17:3 "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." See also John 14:6 "I am... the life"

3. John 17:17 "Your word is truth" Matthew 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will not pass away."

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's Truth;⁴ He is the light that shines in the darkness of an immoral world.⁵ We come to the light when we "practice the Truth"⁶ and we practice the Truth when we yield to scripture because God's word (scripture) is Truth.⁷

The words of scripture are like a flashlight in a dark night showing us the way.⁸ Scripture lights up the chessboard and illumines the other pieces so that we can move wisely. The goal of this book is to show how graphically true this is and how obedience to scripture can heal relationships.

When we disobey scripture, we commit sin. Sin is the opposite of spiritual life because sin causes spiritual death; it kills us spiritually.^{9†} The entire Bible is a warning that sin kills.¹⁰

4. John 14:6 "Jesus answered, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

5. John 1:5 "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

6. John 3:21a "But he that practices the truth comes to the Light..."

7. John 17:17 "Your word is truth"

8. Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

9. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death." † Colossians 2:13 teaches that through the forgiveness earned by Christ on the cross, Christ made us alive when we were dead in our sin ("When you were dead in your transgressions...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions"). Therefore, this passage as well as Romans 6:23 speaks of spiritual death (dead in trespasses and sins) and not physical death. See also Ephesians 2:5 and First Peter 3:18.

10. See Appendix

Obedience to God's word brings spiritual life¹¹ and disobedience to His word brings spiritual death.¹²

Like chess, if we are going to do well, we have to know what will happen *before* we make the move. We have to know what the pieces do and how they interact beforehand so we can predict what the board will look like after the move is made.

Knowing the scriptural effect in advance and moving accordingly permits us to live a life filled with love (excellent relationships), and it enables us to escape sin and spiritual death that is caused by sin. Scripture tells how to know God¹³ and the immense internal peace¹⁴† and freedom that His presence brings.¹⁵ These are not theological constructs; they are experiential. Knowing God is to experience eternal life.

This is eternal life, that they may know
You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ
whom You have sent.¹⁶

11. John 6:63 "...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."

12. See Appendix 1

13. John 14:23 "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'"

14. Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which passes all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." † Only those who are surrendered to Christ and obedient to Him can experience this peace. We must acknowledge God as God before God will relate to us or make Himself known to us (cf. John 14:21).

15. John 8:36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

16. John 17:3 NASV

Knowing God

Knowing Christ is neither a ritual nor is it a study. Knowing Christ is an experience that is dependent upon our obedience. We can know Christ by sincerely obeying His commandments.¹⁷ Jesus makes Himself known to us when we *yield to Him from the heart*:

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him [make Myself known to him].^{18†}

17. Christ gave commandments relating to righteousness, so He is not speaking only of the Ten Commandments in this verse. These commandments are also referred to as His “words” (John 14:23).

18. John 14:21 † In this statement, Jesus requires two things before He will disclose Himself to the Christian; He requires love and He requires obedience. And He requires them in that order because He is describing a relationship with the Christian and love is paramount in all Christian relationships. The relationship between the Christian and Jesus Christ is called “knowing God” (John 17:3) and it is the source of joy and righteousness (Second Peter 1). Knowing God is the core of biblical Christianity. The function of obedience in this relationship is to express love; it is not an end in itself. Obedience is essential because obedience is the avoidance of sin; sin must be avoided because sin kills us spiritually (Romans 6:23). But obedience without love will not result in knowing God because obedience without love is legalism, which is a religious method to obtain something from God and not an effort to relate to Him. Thus, in this verse, Christ touches the core of all honest relationships and asks the same question that we all ask at one time or another. What is the motivation?

Jesus makes Himself known to the one who has His commandments and keeps them because that is the person who loves Him. The person who loves Jesus expresses this love by obedience.

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.^{19†}

We find the same concept in another verse. This verse speaks not of only knowing Him, but of God living with us, and again we see that Jesus strikes at the essence of relationships, which love:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.²⁰

Therefore, knowing Jesus Christ is not a religion; it is a relationship. It is the experience of having Him disclose Himself to us and make His “abode” with us. We can know that He is with us when we experience the presence of His Spirit:

19. First John 2:3 † Here John the Apostle expresses a general truth: those who know Him will keep His commandments because obedience results in knowing Him (John 14:21); it results in His presence with us (John 14:23). There is no greater experience given to man than a spiritual relationship with Christ. All who know Him are motivated to know Him better and to express that motivation with obedience. To know God is to love Him because He is love (First John 4:8).

20. John 14:23

By this we know that we abide in Him
and He in us, because He has given us of
His Spirit.^{21†}

This is what being a Christian is. It is neither doctrine nor religion; it is knowing Jesus Christ. Christianity is not church-work, praying, kneeling, genuflecting, ecstatic speech, unknown languages, swooning, shaking or fainting. It is only one thing. Christianity is knowing God through obedience to scripture.

Paul tells us to test ourselves to see if we are really “of the faith” by looking inside ourselves to see if Jesus Christ is in us.

Test yourselves to see if you are in the
faith; examine yourselves! Or do you
not recognize this about yourselves, that
Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you
fail the test?²²

What scripture is describing in these verses is a spiritual love affair. It is saying that if you know God, you know it. There is no mistaking His presence and His peace.

There is a cause and effect here. As we yield to His commands, Christ, who is love incarnate, makes Himself known to us. To know Christ is to love him. Wherever he goes He brings

21. First John 4:13 † Some 40 years after Christ spoke the words of John 14:21, John verifies their truth because he was still experiencing the presence of Christ. We *know* that we abide in Him and He in us. The same concept is found in Second Peter Chapter 1:2,3 and Philipians 3:8,9. There is a divine precision in these scriptures, even though they were written by different authors far removed from each other and decades apart.

22. Second Corinthians 13:5

love. We receive that love and we return it with *willing* yieldedness and obedience and He who created us²³ discloses Himself to us.²⁴

Thus, decisions to keep His word result in the experiential presence of God. With sincere obedience, one may live an entire lifetime filled with peace.

Knowing Christ brings the peace of God and the peace of God is a peace that surpasses all comprehension.²⁵ One does not have to experience this peace for very long to understand the immense value of scripture because scripture tells us how to acquire that peace and keep it.²⁶

The peace of God flows with love and obedience and it cuts through absolutely everything. It is a spiritual, inner peace that must be experienced to be believed because, exactly as the scripture says, it is beyond our understanding or comprehension.²⁷ It is the end of the void, the end of confusion, then end of unending questions, the end of self-doubt, the end of wandering and the end of searching. It is God.

23. Hebrews 1:2 “[the] Son whom He appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world [or ‘the ages’].”

24. John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them...I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

25. Philippians 4:7 “...the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

26. Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”

27. Philippians 4:6,7 “Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The Problem

There is a problem, however, and the problem is sin. Sin inhibits the presence and peace of God, and sin causes spiritual death.²⁸ Those who do not know Christ are spiritually dead.²⁹ Those Christians who sin do not lose their salvation, but they lose their relationship with Christ and experience life without Christ, the equivalent of spiritual death.³⁰

Everyone is spiritually dead without Christ.³¹ People who are spiritually dead know it because spiritual death is experiential, just like spiritual life. Spiritual life is knowing God; spiritual death is being physically alive but not knowing God.

Spiritual death has various symptoms. Most people who are spiritually dead feel a void inside of them. They have no real peace. The void is the absence of Christ. People who are spiritually dead believe that everyone is the way they are because they have never experienced spiritual life. When an evangelist speaks to them about Christ, they think he is talking about a belief system. They cannot conceive of the reality of a spiritual relationship with God because they have never experienced it. Many believe that there is nothing more in life than what they have experienced, and they resign themselves to their fate. But they are mistaken. They can become spiritually alive by trusting in Jesus Christ and by yielding to His Word.

28. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death...”

29. Ephesians 2:1 “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world...”

30. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

31. John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Becoming spiritually alive after being spiritually dead is like being born a second time. That is the reason that the Bible refers to it as being “born again.”³²

The way to become spiritually alive is to trust in Jesus Christ and the way to know Him is to obey His word.³³ People who come to Christ get all of their sins forgiven because Christ has already paid the penalty for their sin and all they have to do is to trust in Him. It is a gift. Jesus died in their place on the cross. That is the reason why Jesus Christ is so important. If He had not died for us, we would be paying our own penalty for sin and that penalty is death.³⁴

In order to pay our penalty, Jesus became sin for us.³⁵ He died in our place and was later resurrected making us right in the eyes of God in spite of our sins.³⁶ Jesus Christ paid our debt for us. He did this because God loved the world so much that

32. John 3:3 “Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Also see First Peter 1:23 “for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” For a modern understanding see the definition of “born again in Wikipedia: “It is an experience when everything they have been taught as Christians becomes real, and they develop a direct and personal relationship with God.” This relationship cannot be described in words.

33. John 14:21 “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” KJV

34. Roman 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

35. Second Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”

36. Romans 4:25 “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

He gave His only Son to die in our place so that our sins would be forgiven and he could therefore give eternal life to us.³⁷ The benefit of His death is a free gift and we can obtain the benefit of it simply by trusting entirely in Him.³⁸ This is salvation. It is easy and it costs us nothing because the price for it—the entire price—was paid by Christ.^{39†}

If you have trusted in Christ and do not know Him it is because you are not obeying Him.

If you are spiritually dead and not interested in becoming spiritually alive, or if you are not interested in yielding to the commands of scripture, this book will be of little benefit to you because this book is all about love and love is all about knowing God. Of course one does not have to know God to love, but without the presence of God the love that we have is human love and it is limited. And one does not have to live long to discover the frailty of humanity and its loves.

37. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

38. Acts 16:31 “Believe [trust in] on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved...”

39. † If you are not spiritually alive and wish to be, then go someplace where you are alone to pray. In your own words tell Him that you are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all of your sin. That is all you have to do to obtain forgiveness. The amount of faith you need to truly come to Christ is the amount of faith necessary to ask Him for salvation. That is all. You don't have to believe anything else. You don't even have to be sure that He is really there. All you have to do is ask, but in your asking you must be sincere. Also see *Believe in God* which may be downloaded from BIBLEBOOKS.CO.

Love in Scripture

There are many scriptures that tell us about God by telling us His attributes, what He does and how He relates to us. But there are few that tell us directly who He *is*, perhaps only one:

God is love.⁴⁰

When we view this scripture with others, such as John 14:21 (we can know God)⁴¹ and John 17:3 (we can experience eternal life through the knowledge of God)⁴²† we find that the experience of knowing God is to experience His love through His presence because He is love. Experiencing eternal life and knowing God are inextricably bound to love. Love stands at the very center of both of them because God is love.

40. First John 4:8

41. John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

42. John 17:3 “This is eternal life that you may know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” † This scripture equates knowing God with eternal life because to know God is to experience the eternal life that comes from trusting in Jesus Christ. Thus, eternal life is not an extension of mortal life; it is an entirely different life that is overlaid or superimposed upon mortal life. We receive mortal life when we are born the first time and we receive spiritual life when we are born the second time. It is for this reason that scripture analogizes the receipt of spiritual life with being born a second time, because it is the gift of a second life. See First Peter 1:23, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” See also John 3:3 “...you must be born again.”

Scripture places love at the center of other important doctrines as well. For instance love is the center of the doctrine of salvation by grace.⁴³ Love is the core of all of the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament).⁴⁴ Love is the litmus test of eternal salvation or, alternatively, eternal condemnation.⁴⁵†

Knowing Christ is dependent upon love because Christ abides in us when 1) we have trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and 2) when we love Him and express this love by keeping His word:

43. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

44. Matthew 22:36-40 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And He [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all you heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’”

45. John 3:19 “He who believes in Him [Jesus Christ] is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” † John 3:17-21 teaches that eternal salvation turns on what we love. It teaches that the condemnation is that we love darkness rather than light, “but he who practices the truth comes to the Light [Christ], so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.” (v. 21). Men love darkness rather than light because they deeds are evil; so sin changes what we love. God’s judgment ultimately turns upon what we love because what we love determines whether we will come to the light. The more sin we commit, the greater the darkness will be and the more difficult it will be to come to the light.

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word ... and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.^{46†}

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will disclose Myself [make Myself known] to him.⁴⁷

This means that Jesus Christ makes Himself known to those who express their love for Him by obeying scripture. And when He makes Himself known to us we experience eternal life:

And this is eternal life that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.⁴⁸

Knowing Christ is the key to everything pertaining to live and godliness:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power

46. John 14:23 † This scripture and others make it clear that Jesus Christ and God the Father are one (John 10:30 “I [Jesus Christ] and the Father are one;” John 14:9 “Anyone who has seen me [Jesus Christ] has seen the Father.”). Hence, they are treated as one in this book (John 14:9).

47. John 14:21

48. John 17:3

has granted to us everything pertaining to live and godliness through the true knowledge of Him...⁴⁹

Thus, the very core of the New Testament is love. The reason why is because “God is love.”⁵⁰ One cannot study God without studying love.

How this Applies to a Marriage

When a man and a woman are married and both of them are committed to scripture, the marriage is strong, very strong, because sin is minimized and the presence of Christ is maximized. When the presence of Christ is maximized, love overflows because God is there and God is love. When love abounds in this way, it becomes the core of the relationship. When love is the core, the relationship is scriptural and strong because love unites the husband and the wife and covers their sins.⁵¹

But when either the husband or the wife permits the entrance of the sin into the marriage, love falters because Christ abides with us only when we are keeping His word.⁵² Herein lies the problem—and the solution. The solution is obedience and love. But first we must look at what love is, and that is not so easy because there are four of them.



49. Second Peter 1:2,3

50. First John 4:8

51. First Peter 4:8 “Above all, love one another deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” BEREAN STUDY BIBLE

52. John 14:21,23, supra

Chapter 2

The Four Loves

THE ENGLISH WORD FOR LOVE IS
INADEQUATE BECAUSE THERE ARE
FOUR OF THEM

Before we consider the four loves, we should clarify that love is really only one thing. It is affection. It is a very powerful affection but affection is all that it is. As such, however, it has many effects. For instance, love accepts others unconditionally, but it is not acceptance; it is kind but it is not kindness and it is self-sacrificial but it is not self-sacrifice. Love inspires and results in acceptance, kindness and self-sacrifice, but these are not love; they are the *effects* of love. Most of the scriptural passages that refer to love refer to the effects of love or the specific characteristics of the affection that is love.

The presence of such a powerful affection like love makes an immense difference in life because when we love, we show kindness, acceptance and self-sacrifice and the other virtues because we *want* to, not because we have to. That is where the scriptural line is drawn. That is the difference between law and grace and between flesh and spirit. Love is the message of the New Testament. There is no duty in love; only expression. So, when love comes to us, it changes us from the inside. It changes what we want to do and if the love that comes to us originates at the cross and results in salvation, it changes who we are as well.

The love of God is like a song that transfixes an audience with the sheer beauty of its sound. To hear the song is wonderful. But to be the singer who creates the song is an experience to be desired beyond all measure. The Creator is the singer, and

He sings the song of songs. He is love¹ and He sings to us of Himself. And in doing so He empowers us to become the singer and sing His song to others.

On the outside, love may not appear to make much of a difference. We may be duty-bound to a family, and we may continue to fulfill that duty whether we love or not. But when we love the family, the duty becomes a desire; we do it because we want to. Love makes life a pleasure.

The Four Loves

There are four different words for love in biblical Greek (the language of the Bible) and each one is different. So, the English reader is not seeing the real meaning of love when he reads “love” in an English Bible. He is seeing all of the Greek words for love lumped together into the one English word “love.”

Lumping them all together causes significant misunderstandings because the fourth love is vastly different from the other three.

The first of the four loves is the love of family. We experience the love of family before we experience any other love. The Greek word for the love of family is *στοργή*, or “storgé” (“store gay”). Storgé is the natural love of parents for children and children for parents and siblings and other family members. It is similar to friendship, but not the same.^{2†}

1. First John 4:8 “...God is love.”

2. † Although this word is not used in scripture, it is included in the Greek language used in Biblical times.

The second love that we experience is the love of friends. The Greek word for the love of friends is φιλία, or “philía.” This is the word from which we derive “Philadelphia,” which is translated the “City of Brotherly Love.” Philía is the love between friends.³

The third love is the love of lovers. This Greek word for this love is έρωσ or “eros.” Eros is romantic love. Eros may or may not be expressed by physical intimacy. Eros is the “chemistry” between lovers.⁴

These three loves are human loves and God gives all three of them to all of mankind. A gift given to all mankind of this nature is called “common grace” because it is not given just to believers but to everyone. These three loves are given to everyone because everyone is made in the image of God and God is love. These three loves are beautiful in their original forms, but they are human and therefore they are fallible.

Each of these three human loves is defined by its object. Each one is a different type of relationship defined by the one who is loved and the type of affection that results.

The fourth love, however, is different. The fourth love is άγάπη or “agápe” (“ah-gop’-ay”). Agápe is not defined by the one who is loved. Agápe is not limited to any particular relationship or particular person; it can apply to any person and any relationship at any time. Agápe is love, period.

3. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (Second Ed. 1958, Univ. Of Chicago Press), s.v. φιλία, “friendship”

4. See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (Second Ed. 1958, Univ. Of Chicago Press), s.v. έρωσ, “passionate love.”

And agápe is supernatural. We know that agápe is supernatural because scripture tells us plainly that God is supernatural⁵ and it tells us that God is agápe:

...God is Love [agápe]^{6†}

Therefore, agápe is supernatural because God is supernatural.

Agápe comes from God:

αγάπη [agápe] ἐκ [from, from out of]
του θεου [God] ἐστιν [is]⁷

There are other ways to translate this same verse but they all say the same thing:

...love [agápe] is from God (KJV)

...love [agápe] comes from God (NIV)

The Definition of Agápe

Scripture gives us a very clear and comprehensive explanation of agápe. The Bible dedicates an entire chapter to the explanation of agápe; it tells us all of the characteristics of the affection (the love) that is called agápe. That chapter is First Corinthians 13. Every time that First Corinthians 13 says

5. John 4:24 “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.”

6. First John 4:8. † Scripture teaches that God is agápe; it does not teach that agápe is God.

7. First John 4:7

“love” in English, it is translating the Greek word “agápe”⁸ because there is no other word for love in First Corinthians 13 except for agápe.

[Agápe] is patient, agápe keeps no record of wrongs...it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, agápe never fails.⁹

To most people, the love described in First Corinthians 13 seems out of reach. For instance, it is practically impossible to never take a wrong suffered into account because that would mean never taking offense. The reason why it is so out of reach is because agápe does not come from man; it comes from God. It is God’s love, not man’s.

There are no conditions attached to agápe. It is not a love “because” of something and it is not a love “if” anything. It is love “period.” Agápe keeps no records of wrongs and it bears all things. It is therefore an unconditional love. It is, by definition, total acceptance no matter what. Agápe loves in spite of all sin and all fault. To agápe someone means to remove all conditions attached to acceptance and to love and accept that person in spite of anything and everything. Agápe loves the unloveable.

8. Agápe is translated “charity” in the King James Version and love in other English versions, but each instance of “charity” or “love” in First Corinthians 13 is a translation of agápe.

9. First Corinthians 13:4-8

Agápe is the love that took Jesus Christ to the cross¹⁰ to die for the ungodly.¹¹ † To agápe someone means to accept that person just as Christ accepted us. Christ died for the sins of the entire world,¹² and in doing so He died for the very Romans who killed him. Jesus Christ was loving them and accepting them at the same time that they were crucifying him.¹³ He commands us to accept and to love (agápe) others with that same love and acceptance.¹⁴

10. John 3:16 “For God so loved [agápe] the world that He gave his only gotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

11. Romans 5:6 “Christ died for the ungodly.” † In addition to being love (agápe), God is also just (Isaiah 61:8, Psalm 88:4; Luke 18:7) and will therefore punish sin with its due penalty, which is death (Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”). Those who trust in Christ are in Christ spiritually (Galatians 3:26-28; First Peter 5:14; Philippians 1:1; John 14:20) and His death was effectively theirs. We have been united with Him in the likeness of His death and of His resurrection (Romans 6:5; also see BAG s.v. ὁμοίωμα “in the same death”). The penalty for sin is death and Christ paid that penalty for us. Therefore no one who is in Christ will have to pay that penalty. No one who is in Christ will be condemned for sin (Romans 8:1).

12. First John 2:2 “... He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

13. Luke 23:33,34 “...they crucified Him there, along with the criminals, one on His right and the other on His left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”

14. John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Circles

Although scripture teaches that we are to “agápe one another”¹⁵ and to agápe our enemies,¹⁶ that does not mean that we must be close friends with everyone. All it means is that we must accept everyone to the extent of whatever relationship exists—and we can determine the extent of that relationship. In short, agápe means that we must not judge anyone, but it does not require us to invite them to dinner. It does mean, however, that we should buy someone a meal if he is hungry.

To agápe the person who sins is not an assent to his sin. To agápe someone is to unconditionally accept the *person* in spite of his sin. It is a decision not to condemn the person himself but it is not an acknowledgment that sin is not really sin. It is accepting the person within the boundaries of whatever relationship we have established.

Each friend sets his own boundary to a friendship. One friend may set his or her boundary close and the other far. It is as if each one draws a circle that defines the limits of the friendship for that person. One friend may draw the circle small and the other large. And each friend can change his or her circle at any time because scripture does not require us to be bound by the relational boundaries set by others.

15. John 13:34 “A new commandment I [Jesus] give to you, that you [agápe] one another, even as I have [agáped] you, that you also [agápe] one another.”

16. Matthew 5:44 “But I [Jesus] say to you, agápe your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

The friendship is therefore limited by the smaller circle and each friend should accept this. Healthy friendships are always defined by the lowest common denominator, which is the smaller circle. But within that circle—whatever its boundary may be—agápe must freely flow.¹⁷

But the circle of marriage is different.

The Circle of Marriage

The scriptural marriage is different because in the scriptural marriage the parties do not draw their own circles. In a scriptural marriage, there is only one circle and scripture draws it. The scriptural marriage circle includes everything, good and bad. It is so large that the husband and the wife become one person and the circles of both are exactly the same and they cannot be altered.

But from the beginning, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.¹⁸

We are to agápe our spouse and accept him or her unconditionally no matter what. That is the command of scripture. It means that we accept our spouse in spite of all sin, all insults and all offenses because this is what agápe is. We accept the person unconditionally, but we do not agree with or assent to his or her sin. We accept our spouse *in spite of* his sin.

17. First John 4:7 “Beloved, let us [agápe] one another.”

18. Mark 10:6-8

We should never forget that the source of agape is God Himself and without God, we cannot agápe.

The one who does not [agápe] does not know God because God is [agápe].¹⁹

To agápe is the secret to happiness for the Christian because agápe merges with the other loves and emparts its characteristics to them. The result is a life that is filled with God and His love.



Chapter 3

Loves Merge

LOVES MERGE AND ENHANCE ONE
ANOTHER

Loves merge. They co-exist.

For instance, we may love a cousin or a sibling with both the love of family and the love of a friend. When that occurs, the structure of the familial bond co-exists with easy freedom of friendship and the bond is much stronger. The friends become bonded by two loves rather than one and the relationship has taken on both the flexibility of friendship and the stability of family as well.

The same is true with romantic eros. Eros is strong but it is limited to chemistry and romance. More is required; every lover knows this. To be lasting, eros needs more breadth and it obtains it when the lovers find things that they have in common. When they do, they become friends as well as lovers and the romantic aspect of their relationship acquires an overlay of easy friendship. The two loves merge and one can hardly tell one love from the other.

When the lovers eventually marry, they are all three. They are friends, family and lovers all at once and each one loves the other with three loves. They love with the whimsy of a carefree friendship, with the structure of a permanent familial bond and with the power of eros. Like metals melting together, eros lends its fire to the other two and all three merge into a easy warmth.

But the honeymoon eventually ends and love cools as the imperfections in spouses become evident. Arguments occur and the magnificent love affair bows its head to reality.

Where is the love that once burned so brightly? Is it so fragile that it survives only when the imperfections of the lovers are obscured by the fog of eros? What is this affection that is powerful only when it pleases? And what is this thing called love that blesses us with both ecstasy and pain?

And what about this agápe that supposedly never fails? Where did it go?

Agápe, much like the other three loves, is outside of ourselves, but unlike the other three, there is no turning with agápe. Agápe is supernatural and it is constant. It bears all things and it never fails.¹ It never takes offense. It bears all of the imperfections of a spouse and does not bow its head when confronted with disappointment. And, like the other three, agápe merges with the other loves, and when it does, it empowers them and imbues them with the virtues of First Corinthians 13. Agápe is invaluable because it cuts through the imperfections of the other person. That is the reason why Christ instructs us to agápe one another.

A new commandment I give to you, that you [agápe] one another, even as I have [agáped] you, that you also [agápe] one another. ^{2†}

1. First Corinthians 13:8 “[Agápe] never fails...”

2. John 13:34 † This verse is an example of the divine precision of scripture. Christ does not say “Agápe one another as I have agáped you;” He adds “that you also agápe one another.” This addition is not a repetition. The word “that” in the phrase is ἵνα (“hina”) which means “in order that”

When agápe merges with of the other loves, it instills its power into them. When it does, the other loves acquire the constancy and the strength of agápe. Agápe is like a stem cell. It grows into whatever love to which it finds itself attached. When agápe is paired with the love of friends, it transforms phileo into a life-long bond of friendship. This was the love that Christ was speaking of when He told His disciples to agápe one another.

When agápe is paired with the love of family, it creates a foundation of certainty that is unmatched. And when agápe pairs with the love of lovers it creates a love that is both physical and spiritual at the same time. Fickle eros becomes an oak in the presence of agápe. It is transformed into a human love that never fails, a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”³

The merger of agápe into a marriage is *everything* because agápe imparts supernatural strength to the other three loves, and it is love, not reason, that forms the basis for a scriptural marriage.

The couples who have agápe love with four loves all at once. They will live in continual peace and in love’s unending warmth. Their marriage will never fail. Agápe is the secret to an excellent marriage because when God with His agápe is present in a relationship, no one *wants* to sin. No one wants to insult or

or “for the purpose of,” or “you must.” Jesus is saying that He has agáped us in order for us to be able to agápe each other. Why? Because we have no agápe of our own. We have no agápe of our own because “[agápe] is from God,” not from us. Agápe is supernatural. We receive God’s agápe from God’s presence and God’s presence comes when we yield. If we are to agápe, we must yield to Christ’s commands.

3. First Corinthians 13:7 (NASV)

offend. No one wants to engage in any inappropriate anything and even if it happens, the other spouse will not take offense. God changes what we *want* to do. He changes what we love.

Agápe merged with human love is the love that every husband wants from his wife and it is the love that every wife wants from her husband. It is love that accepts unconditionally. It is love that enables a family to endure the relentless assaults of life—and still be there at the end of the day when the husband and the wife can finally close the bedroom door against the rest of the world.

Like the miracle of the water changed into wine,⁴ human love becomes transformed in the presence agápe because the presence of agápe is the presence of Christ.⁵ Agápe is a reservoir of love that is never exhausted.⁶ Agápe is endless. Agápe is endless love and agápe renders human loves to be endless as well. Agápe is a backbone of iron to all of the other loves.

Agápe is a shield against failed love, flickering intimacy and silent grudges because it takes no offense; it loves even when it has been wronged.⁷ The greatest virtues of the other loves are conveyed and strengthened by agápe. Consideration and respect, kindness, patience, humility, enduring all things, and trust are all included in First Corinthians 13, which defines agápe.⁸ Getting and keeping agápe is everything to a marriage.

4. John 2:1-11

5. First John 4:8 "...God is agápe"

6. First Corinthians 13:8 "...[agápe] never fails."

7. First Corinthians 13:7 "... [agápe] bears all things...endures all things..."

8. Consideration: "agápe does not act unbecomingly" (v.5); "agápe is not jealous" (v.4); "agápe is kind" (v.4); "agápe is patient" (v.4); "agápe does

But why does agápe disappear? And where does eros go?
Why does love have to end?

Only one thing can make love end and chase away agápe.
That one thing is sin. Sin kills spiritual life, inhibits the knowl-
edge of God (agápe) and sin kills love.

But how? And why? And what sin?



not seek its own" (v.5); "agápe is not provoked" (v.5); "agápe endures all things" (v.7); "agápe believes all things" (v.7); "But now abide faith, hope and agápe, but the greatest of these is agápe" (v.13).

Chapter 4

The Twin Sins

CRITICISM AND UNFORGIVENESS
ARE SINS AGAINST LOVE

There are sins against a person or property, such as violence; there are sins against one self, such as drugs. And there are sins against relationships, such as adultery. Sins committed against relationships are called relational sins.

They are sins against relationships because they are rejections of the person or otherwise injurious to a relationship. Other sins may injure the person physically or may divest the person of goods or assets, but they are committed by a friend, they do not harm relationships.

Relational sins are extremely important because except for “things,” relationships are everything. We were created to relate. The greatest pleasures in life are in relationships. True intimacy is an inherent desire of every human. True love is the unspoken desire of most of us.

If the relationship is love and the relational sin is against the relationship, then the sin is a sin against love. Love in some form or another is really what a relationship is. It may be as light as a professional friendship centered around nothing but work. Or it may be as deep as love affair that somehow creates an inner peace and completion never known before.

There are, of course, many different relational sins because any sin that damages a relationship is a relational sin. A sin may damage the relationship tangentially like an embarrassing act that is not directed against anyone in particular. Or a relational sin may damage a relationship directly, such as an overt insult.

Relational sins such as insults or infidelity are obvious when are committed and discovered. Dealing with overt sins of this nature may not be easy, but it is very clearly defined. With overt relational sins, there is never any question about what has occurred and no denying the damage that they do. Overt relational sins are obvious and it is immediately clear that the sin has to stop or the relationship will be irretrievably damaged. Overt relational sins are clear-cut.

This book is not directed toward overt relational sins. This book is about two particularly insidious relational sins that are hidden and therefore ultimately more destructive than many overt sins. They are silent and they are everywhere. These are the sins of criticism and unforgiveness. Criticism and unforgiveness are sins directly against love.

Criticism and unforgiveness are sins against love because love, at its core, is acceptance and these sins are, at their core, rejections. Each critical conclusion is a piece of unspoken rejection. Each unforgiven wrong is a wedge that separates. These are sins against acceptance and they are therefore sins against love because love is acceptance. We know that love is acceptance because scripture tells us over and over in First Corinthians 13 (as we previously saw in Chapter 2).

Since God is love¹ and we are made in His image,² we were created to abide in love.³ He is not pleased when we commit sins against love; and, as we will see, He makes His displeasure abundantly clear to those who know Him.

Criticism and unforgiveness are the most insidious of all relational sins because the people who commit them believe that they are justified.

These sins appear to be justified because no one criticizes or holds a grudge without a reason. And that reason is generally that someone else has offended us. Criticism is a natural response to the hurtful act of someone else. It is normal to react, to defend or to injure back in response to an injury. And it is natural to “remember” what someone did and let it continue to injure acceptance. This is just the way we are. When we are injured we react in kind against the person who has injured us and we are justified in doing so. But are we?

We are not justified. Scripture teaches precisely the opposite. We are commanded not to take retribution,⁴ not to take offense⁵ and never to embrace the root of bitterness.⁶ We are

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1. First John 4:8 “...God is love [agape].”
 2. Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”
 3. First John 4:16 “God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”
 4. Romans 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
 5. First Corinthians 13:5 Agápe “does not take into account a wrong suffered.”
 6. Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God;

to turn the other cheek.⁷ Why? Why let the aggressor get away with it? Because a closer look discloses that the true beneficiary of the admonition to turn the other cheek is the one who has been injured.

The Sin of Unforgiveness

Jesus commands us to forgive without reservation and to forgive *from the heart*. He commands us to forgive when it hurts, forgive when we are in the right and forgive when forgiveness feels so very wrong. He tells us to forgive when we cannot forgive and then forgive again. Forgive *just because he told us to forgive*. Never cease to forgive. Live in an ocean of forgiveness. Forgiveness is freedom.⁸ Forgiveness is the door to the presence of Christ⁹ and the presence of Christ is the secret to everything that pertains to Life and godliness.¹⁰ Forgiveness and the presence of Christ that results from it is the secret to true contentment, happiness and joy.

that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled”

7. Matthew 5:39 “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” † This was the meaning of Jesus’ teaching here, that we should not return insults for insults or minimally intrusive acts such as a slap. He was not teaching that we should not defend ourselves if seriously attacked.

8. John 8:35.37 “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin... if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

9. John 10:9 “I am the door...”

10. Second Peter 1:3 “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him...”

During World War II in Amsterdam there was a Dutch Christian woman who aided Jews to escape the holocaust. Her name was Corrie Ten Boom. She was eventually caught and sent to a concentration camp with her sister. She survived and after the war she began a ministry to those who had also survived the camps. Near the end of her ministry and her life, she summed up what she had learned over and over again about people dealing with injuries dealt by other people. She said,

Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.¹¹

Unforgiveness is spiritual poison.

Forgiveness is absolutely essential to the presence of Christ because it was forgiveness—the cross—that brought Him to us in the first place. God has *zero* patience with those who enjoy the eternal forgiveness purchased by the immense price paid by Jesus Christ and then refuse to extend their own comparatively minimal forgiveness to others.

The commandment issued by Christ to forgive unconditionally is one of the strongest worded commandments in all of scripture:

11. Ten Boom, Corrie (*Guideposts Magazine*, Nov. 1972)

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.^{12†}

The presence of Christ comes to us when we keep His word¹³ and His word is a command to forgive without reservation. When we keep His word He abides in us.¹⁴ The experiential Christian life begins with obedience to His commandments, the foundation of these commandments is a life free of condemnation, a life of unlimited forgiveness.

As in the command not to criticize, the command to forgive is blanket. It contains no exceptions, no time limit and no limit to the number of times we are to forgive.¹⁵ Scripture teaches

12. Matthew 6:14 † This scripture teaches us how God relates to us in this life, not eternally. In this life God treats us with the same liberality with which we treat others. One can never lose the forgiveness (salvation) given by Christ because it is not ours to give or to take. It is not earned by our righteousness, but earned by Christ and given to us through no merit of our own (Ephesians 2:8,9). The accomplishment of the cross is not so minimal as to be left open to the frivolous whims and inevitable sins of man (Romans 8:38). The forgiveness that was earned by the death of Christ belongs to Christ alone and He alone decides where it goes. Man can neither earn it, acquire it or dispose of it by himself.

13. John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

14. John 14:23 “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

15. Matthew 18:22 “Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’

that unforgiveness is never justified. Conversely, the failure to forgive is always sinful and will always damage the love of the person who fails to forgive and impede his relationship with Christ. Love is acceptance. Unforgiveness is rejection. One cannot accept and reject at the same time. Unforgiveness is a sin against love; it is rejection.

The effect of unforgiveness is a root of bitterness,¹⁶ which is a legendary poison. So, exactly like the command not to judge, the passage that demands unconditional forgiveness¹⁷ is intended to free the injured party from the effect of the resentment caused by the injury. And it is intended to leave the perpetrator open to conviction by the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Never permit one thimbleful of the poison of resentment to ever pollute the crystal clear waters of God's reservoir of agápe. Free yourself. True forgiveness is true victory. True forgiveness

Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'

16. Hebrews 12:15 "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."

17. Matthew 18:21, 22 "Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

18. John 16:8 ""And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin..."

is true freedom.¹⁹ Christ was referring to all sin, including forgiveness, when He said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”²⁰

Forgiveness is the love language of God. Forgiveness is acceptance as agápe is acceptance, and the core of First Corinthians 13. Forgiveness is the most powerful and magnificent expression of God’s agápe. The apex of that expression occurred at the cross, when Jesus Christ paid for the sins of the entire world²¹ and then offered it for free to anyone who wants it to accept it.²²

It is the weaker brother, who must show that he is right. It is the weaker brother or sister who must end a marriage and destroy a family because of unforgiveness. Strength is not winning a dispute. Strength is not needing to win.

When we refuse to take up the offense proffered by an insult or injury, we deny the offender the opportunity to justify his offense through a dispute. When we leave the offense on the table, we are choosing to move over and make room for the Holy Spirit to convict the offender of his sin²³ rather than taking on the job of the Holy Spirit ourselves. The Holy Spirit is far more capable than we and with Him, there is no argument at all.

19. John 8:36 “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

20. John 8:36

21. First John 2:2 “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

22. Revelation 22:17 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

23. Romans 12:19 “Never take your own renege, beloved, but leave

Sadly, the internal conflict caused by the original offense, the missing justice and the emotional fire that burns following a refusal to respond in kind are often reason enough not to obey, and enough justification never move over and make room for Him to act.

We fill in His space with the world's "justice" and with our conditional human love. We read the scriptures and then we circumvent them with exceptions. We yield to the scriptures that please us, ignore the others and decorate the pleasant ones with scrolls and butterflies and put them on our walls. And like the hypocrites trumpeting their alms in the temple, we have our reward.

But if you do not forgive men, then
your Father will not forgive your trans-
gressions.^{24†}

The Sin of Criticism

The Greek word for criticism is κρίνω (krino). When applied to the judgment that people customarily pass on the lives and actions of others, the word means to judge, to pass judgment upon, to express an opinion about, to criticize or find fault with.²⁵ To judge means to criticize.

room for the wrath of God...:

24. Matthew 6:14 † This verse may be referred to as the "omitted verse" because it is so rarely mentioned in evangelical circles.

25. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (University of Chicago Press), 2d Ed. 1958, p. 451, s.v. κρίνω, 1. "separate, distinguish, then select, prefer" 2. "judge, think, consider" 3. "pass judgment upon,; "reach a decision, decide"... 6. "of the judgment which people customarily pass upon...the lives of their fellowmen. Judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about (citing Matthew

Christ's command against criticism is straightforward and crystal clear:

Do not judge [criticize] so that you will not be judged [criticized]. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you...^{26†}

He goes on to clarify that His admonition not to criticize is not limited to sharp words but can include well-intended words as well:

And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?²⁷

Christ is telling us plainly "Do not judge." Do not be critical or condemnatory because we will be judged "with the same standard of measure" that we use to measure others.

The word "criticize" or "judge" is not the same as the word "condemn." So, when Matthew 7:1 commands us not to judge, it is not saying "do not condemn," it is saying "do not even judge others, even if your judgment is not condemnatory." In Luke 6:37 we find both words used. The command is not to judge *and* not to condemn:

7:1)...especially in an unfavorable sense pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn..."

26. Matthew 7:1,2. † All instances of "judge" or "judged" in this passage are translations of Greek word κρίνω (krino), which means to form an opinion about, to criticize or to condemn. This concept is discussed in more detail later in this book.

27. Matthew 7:3

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:
condemn not, and ye shall not be con-
demned: forgive, and ye shall be
forgiven.²⁸

These passages prohibit the relational sin of criticism. However, there is a line between judging and act and judging the person who commits the act. Scripture is not telling us to close our eyes to sin. It is not telling us to pretend that it does not exist or pretend that someone is not committing it. We are to recognize sin for what it is, but we are not to judge the person who committed the sin. We are not to conclude that he is a “bad” person. We are to recognize and to judge a sinful act, but we are not to judge the sinner. Depending on what the sin is, and the circumstances, we may well conclude that his company is deleterious or even dangerous and therefore avoid him. But we are forbidden to condemn him or see him as of lesser value because of his sin. We are not to think ill of him because of it. We are to let it pass.

Everyone has his own cross to bear; and we are not to criticize him for how he bears it.

This means we are not to take offense. To take offense is to harbor critical and condemnatory thoughts or to hold a grudge. Certainly, when we receive an injury, we feel emotional pain and we have not choice about it. But when it comes to taking up an offense, we certainly do have a choice. Scripture tells us that the correct choice is always “No.”

It is as if two people were sitting across from each other at a table. Both of them know that throwing offenses at one another across the table is sin, but one of them does it anyway.

28. Luke 6:37

The offense strikes the other person and injures her and then lands back on the table. Now it is the injured person's turn. She can either pick up the offense and throw it back or hold it for later, or she can leave the offense on the table. Scripture tells us to leave it on the table because throwing offenses is sin and it doesn't matter if they are deserved or not.

God relates to us with the same acceptance or rejection that we give to others.^{29†} So, the person who threw the offense has begun to alienate himself from God because God will deal with him in the same way that he deals with others: un-accepting. This being the case, the offended party now has an opportunity to either enhance his or her relationship with God or deplete it, depending on whether she takes up the offense or leaves it on the table.

Matthew 7:2 is saying, "If you want God to be distant, then criticize others, because He will be just as accepting of you as you are of the people you criticize. But if you want God to be close, then leave the offense on the table and refuse to criticize, even in your thoughts, and God will do the same with you. He will use *your* standard in how He deals with you. So, the greater we are offended, the greater is our opportunity to establish a lenient, accepting relationship with Christ. The larger the offense is, the closer you will be to God because He will deal with you with the same measure that you use to deal with others.

29. Matthew 7:2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." † Both Matthew 6:15 and Matthew 7:1 refer to the way God relates to us in this life. They cannot refer to the final judgment or the eternal state of Christians because Jesus Christ paid for the past, present and future sins of all Christians and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1; 8:28; Revelation 20:6)

And herein lies the great irony of God. The greater the harm suffered, the greater the benefit becomes when we place it in His hands by obeying His command. God is in the business of receiving the ashes of pain and giving beauty in return.³⁰

On the other hand, both scripture and common sense dictate that even though we are not to judge, we should avoid anyone who would cause us ill.³¹ For instance, we should decline relationships that yoke us with those who do not know Christ.³² The command not to criticize or condemn does not mean that we should create or pursue any unwise relationship. All it means is that we are not to criticize.

Matthew 7:1 contains no limiting factor such as “don’t be hasty in your judgment” or “be sure that your criticism is justified” or “It’s OK to think that way because you’re right.” Instead, the prohibition is a blanket prohibition: “Judge [criticize] not.” This is a prohibition against *any* judgment or criticism of a person, and it makes no difference whether the judgment or criticism is accurate or inaccurate, true or false, justified or unjustified. Whether the criticism is deserved or undeserved makes no difference.³³ Nor does it matter if the criticism is not expressed. Criticism does not have to be verbalized to be real.

30. Isaiah 61:3 “... to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” KJV

31. First Corinthians 15:33 “Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals.”

32. Second Corinthians 6:14 “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

33. This is not a command not to communicate; it is a command not to condemn. The difference is discussed in a later chapter.

The reason why Christ commands us not to criticize is not just because it causes pain to others; it is also because criticism assaults the love of the person does it because it is a relational sin. It is a piece of rejection of the person criticized. Before we speak, we should ask ourselves, “Is it critical?” Or “Will it be understood as being critical?”

Harboring critical thoughts (a critical spirit) because of what someone did is just as much a sin as whatever it was he did to cause you to criticize.³⁴ Harboring the resentments that normally arise from criticism is holding a grudge. Just because we say nothing after taking up an offense does not mean that we are not committing a silent relational sin. This is the root of bitterness.³⁵ Christ is telling us that we are never to permit a root of bitterness to start growing. Christ is telling us to leave it on the table.

The Twin Sins in the Marriage Circle

The scriptural marriage is like a circle filled with love (agápe) and fidelity. It is intended to be a place of rest and complete acceptance. There should be no questions lingering within the marriage circle and no grudges and no unforgiveness. There is only trust and love. When we place criticism, condemnation or unforgiveness into the circle, we adulterate the marriage. It is like pouring sewer water into a well.

34. Proverbs 23:7 “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...”

35. Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many be defiled.”

The two who live within the circle are one person, not two. They are one.³⁶ Neither the husband or the wife is better or lesser than the other. They are of equal worth and equal importance but God has made them differently and given each one a different role with different responsibilities. Rank or importance does not exist within the circle. There is no rank in the circle of marriage, nor is there any difference in importance or value; the only difference is the difference in function, the only difference is a difference in role.

The circle of marriage is different from the circle of friendship, because when criticism or unforgiveness enters the circle of friendship, the offended friend is free to redraw his circle and to limit or end the relationship. But in a biblical marriage, the circle is drawn by scripture and it cannot be redrawn. So, when either of the parties places criticism or unforgiveness into the circle, it cannot be removed by changing the circle's diameter. It can be removed only by the party who introduced it—and it will remain in the circle as long as it is remembered by one of the spouses. Dirty water into clean.

Christ commands both parties to treasure the agápe (unconditional love and acceptance) that is in the marriage circle³⁷ and to keep it unpolluted with relational sin. If both parties obey, then each party will be unconditionally accepted and love will flow. If both parties do not obey, then each party will not be unconditionally accepted and love will not flow. But both parties must drink from the well, whether it be dirty or clean.

36. Mark 10:8 "...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh."

37. John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you [agápe] one another, even as I have [agáped] you, that you also [agápe] one another.

When criticism and unforgiveness are permitted into the circle, they remain there long after the original sin that engendered them has ended because resentment continues long after the initiating sin is over. Thus the effects of the injury go far beyond the injury itself and the sins of unforgiveness and criticism can be more destructive than the original offense.

Like a tiger stalking a wounded antelope, Satan stalks the wounded Christian. He ignores the original offense because the offender will eventually learn his lesson, but Satan smells blood in the unforgiving heart of the injured party, the heart that remembers, the heart that criticizes and condemns. There, in the unforgiving heart, is his home.

The mechanics of how these sins destroy families is expressed in various ways. But perhaps the most prevalent method of destruction is the Coin Game.



Chapter 5

The Coin Game

THE MECHANICS OF DYING LOVE

The Coin Game is devastating and it is death to a marriage.

In the coin game, each unforgiven offense becomes a “coin” that is kept by the one who has been offended.

When the Offense is Declined

Suppose that Jack injures Jill with an insult or an inconsiderate act and it hurts Jill’s feelings. It is a subtle but stinging insult, but Jill says nothing. Jack injured Jill and Jill did not deserve it. But Jill looks to scripture and scripture tells her to forgive Jack from her heart and not to take up the offense that Jack has offered to her. Jill yields her will to God; she obeys and declines to take up the offense. She forgives Jack from her heart and leaves the offense on the table. The burn of the offense subsides and eventually dies and Jill is free. Maybe she will bring up the matter later on, or maybe not. But for now she is free; she has no lingering resentment, no root of bitterness, and nothing to inhibit her expression of love. Jack, however, is not free because Jack, for all of his pretense, well understands what he said and by refusing to take up the offense, Jill has deprived Jack of any opportunity to verbally justify what he has done. Jack must now live with what he did or he must come to her and apologize. He has no other choice.

Ideally, Jack will apologize to Jill and Jill, who now harbors no resentment, will find it easy to forgive him.

When the Offense is Accepted

On the other hand, let us consider what happens if Jill acts on her feelings, rejects the command of Christ in Matthew 7:1 and embraces condemnation by taking up Jack's offense. Perhaps Jack apologizes and Jill tells him that she forgives him. But even though scripture tells her that she must forgive Jack from the heart,¹ she does not sincerely forgive him. She embraces the resentment that Jack has proffered and picks up the offense and holds it.² She may believe that she cannot forgive because of the way Jack made her feel or she may believe that because it was Jack's fault, she does not have to forgive. She reasons that because Jack made her feel bad she is justified in taking up and keeping the offense. She did nothing wrong. It was Jack who made her feel bad, not her. He *hurt* her and she cannot just ignore it. Accordingly, she retains the offense because it is the natural thing to do.

There are consequences associated with disobeying God's command to forgive and not to judge. And it doesn't make any difference whether the person who disobeys knows what God's word says or not; God's word is there not simply to require a particular behavior, but to reveal to us who we really are. It is there to disclose a reality that is obscured by natural impulse. In this instance, both Jack and Jill have sinned and both Jack and Jill will pay the price.

1. Matthew 18:21,22 "Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

2. First Corinthians 13:5 "[agápe]...does not take into account a wrong suffered." (NASV)

Having taken up the offense, Jill will now internalize it. Once the offense has been internalized, it becomes a “coin” that can be used later on to justify retribution against Jack. Jack owes her now. Maybe Jill did not initially intend to ever use the coin, but she soon discovers that if she keeps the coin, things that she may say or do against Jack can be “paid for” with the coin. She can justify what she does against Jack because she has the coin. And as long as she has the coin she does not have to forgive Jack. Jack deserves what he gets so she keeps her coin. Jill remembers.

But coins always demand some type of response because no one can live comfortably with unforgiveness. Coins demand an outlet. The outlet may be venting or it may be an unspoken emotional response. Or it may be self-pity (first cousin to unforgiveness and equally as deadly). Or, rather than self-pity it may be repeated dissatisfaction and complaining. Or it may be a distancing from Jack that she cannot reverse. Or, it may take a more overt form and be used to justify adultery or some type of retribution, such as gossip or perhaps it will be plain anger that explodes at the next convenient time. But it will be something because coins demand an expression and that expression is always destructive. Vengeance can be satisfying, but vengeance is sin³ and the devil will have his due from both of them.

The more coins Jill collects the more freedom she feels to injure or slander Jack and at the same time feel fully justified. After all, Jack is the one to blame for each one of the coins. It was Jack the created them, not her.

3. Romans 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘vengeance is mine; I will repay’ says the Lord.”

When Jill's collection of coins becomes large enough and with a sufficiently broad spectrum of different kinds of offenses, she reaches the point where she may confer upon herself the title of *Victim*.

Once the title of Victim is conferred, every perceived offense can be used to solidify her title. Jill is now searching for offenses for the very purpose of verifying her title and for the satisfaction that the coins give—initially. She is proficient and thorough in her search and she is successful. She finds offenses in the most unlikely places and stores each one of them in her coin purse.

With coins in the coin purse, the Victim no longer has to burden herself with the embarrassment and humiliation of confession and forgiveness for whatever sins she commits. In order to unburden herself of guilt, all she has to do is to point to the title of Victim and the sin is balanced in her mind. And if it not fully balanced, the anesthetic of self-pity is always available to the *Victim*. So Jill keeps her coins and her sin.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of acquiring the title of Victim is that the coins in the coin purse no longer have to be used only against the perpetrator who put them there. They become generalized and can be used anywhere because the Victim is now a victim of life in general.

The phrase “Hurting people hurt people” is the mantra of the coin gamers. It means, “I have been injured so I injure others and I am justified when I do.” It is a truism for the unforgiving, because unforgiving people will always use their own hurt to justify hurting others. People who chant that mantra have achieved the title of Victim. They are unhappy people because they keep coins. The more coins they keep, the more

unhappiness they acquire. Coins are fertile soil for the roots of bitterness. And Jill's bitterness is rooted deep into her coins and now flowers in her heart like winding briars.⁴

In our example, Jill is indeed a victim, but not in the way that she thinks. She is a Victim of her own unforgiveness because the bitterness created by the coins destroys her from within. Some Victims are Christians who confess the root of bitterness but keep the coins anyway because they are afraid to let them go because without them they would have to face the unthinkable. Letting go of them would mean that all of the sin that has been justified by the coins would no longer be justified. Giving up the coins would mean that the scale of guilt and blame would become unbalanced and fall back hard. She would be forced to admit what she has become; and pride will not permit her to do this, so she keeps her coins. She is storing up punishment for herself⁵ and anesthetizing her guilt with the self-pity created by the coins.

As long as she keeps the coins, forgiveness for her own sin cannot come to her because he who asks for forgiveness must also confess his own sin and the coins are kept for the purpose of avoiding exactly that.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.⁶

4. Hebrews 12:15 "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled..."

5. Romans 2:5 "...because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself"

6. First John 1:9

One cannot experience the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and at the same time refuse to forgive others.⁷ Jill's only true remedy is confession and forgiveness but the coins have become a part of her, so she keeps them and says whatever she is expected to say about forgiveness.

Ultimately, Jill will realize that the coins are spiritual poison. But she cannot let them go. Nor can she keep them because of what they are doing to her. Her only relief is to express the pain that now echoes in the void that is inside her.

Like a pressure cooker with a broken valve, Jill must relieve the pressure or explode. She relieves the pressure by expression and that expression may be directly to Jack or, for the sake of peace, it may be to friends about Jack. When it is to friends, it is called gossip and slander.

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and hatred. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips...⁸

7. Matthew 6:14,15 "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

8. Romans 1:29

Gossip is on par with murder in this scripture, and those who practice it are worthy of death.^{9†} God promises that he will destroy or cut-off those who practice this sin.^{10†} The practical consequence of this sin is to be cut-off from God’s presence and peace.

The root word for gossip in the Greek New Testament literally means “whisperer.” It does not require that the statement be false.^{11†} The statement need only be a derogatory report about someone else without a legitimate purpose.

Coin gamers are compulsive gossips. Scripture commands against it¹² but gossip is their primary outlet. Gossip or slander relieves the pressure because each particular slander is a verification that the speaker is justified and that she is a true Victim.

9. Romans 1:32 “...those who practice such things are worthy of death...” † Taken with other scriptures, the implication here is that these sins will result in spiritual death—the effective absence of spiritual life. See John 14:21, 23 which require obedience to experience the presence of God. To know God, which is to experience His presence within, is to experience eternal life (spiritual life) in this (mortal) life (John 17:3).

10. Psalm 101:5 “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will is cut off...” † The word that is translated “cut off” (צמח) “is a very strong word for destruction or completely silencing someone...to cut off from His city those who slander the righteous” (TWOT 1932).

11. † The word means “whispering, (secret) gossip, tale-bearing” See Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2d. Edition, 1958) s.v. ψιθυρισμός. The distinction between the words for gossip and slander is that slander carries an implication of falsity but gossip does not.

12. Titus 2:3,4 “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children...”

A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.¹³

Gossips will find other gossips who are willing to listen to them and ratify their slanderous words with sympathetic responses. They are verifying and bolstering their title of *Victim* and they are relieving themselves.

If the coin gamer is the wife, she will find another wife with whom she can commiserate about her husband. They share stories and gossip passes quietly over cups of coffee. Seeds are planted and the newly initiated wife returns home wondering if she will see verification that her newly minted suspicion about her husband is correct. And sure enough, something inevitably occurs that confirms to her that he is imperfect and deserving of her wrath or rejection.

Families can withstand bankruptcy, death, loss of jobs, illness, accidents and even adultery, and sometimes grow stronger because of it. But when faced with the continued assault of the coin gamers with their cups of coffee, the family will die.

Any wife who permits herself to listen to gossip and slander about her husband, whether it is true or not, is adulterating her marriage.

Any husband who permits himself to listen to gossip and slander about his wife, whether it is true or not, is adulterating his marriage. It is his duty to defend his family and he is permitting the honor of his family to be compromised if he does not take steps to cause the slander to cease. One does not often find

13. Proverbs 16:28

anyone slandering someone's wife because the response could well be both physical and immediate. But that does not prevent the husband from condemning his wife in his own heart.

The coin game is not a prerequisite for the death of love; it is merely a facilitator. The death of love comes when the lover continually commits any relational sin (either silently or overtly). So, the scriptural dynamic in Jill's life is obvious. The love for her husband she previously enjoyed has long since departed. There are remnants of it to be sure but what once was is no longer.

Why? Because the presence of God departs with the continued commission of relational sin.¹⁴ And when the presence of God departs so does His agápe. His agápe departs because He *is* agápe¹⁵ and He departs from sin. When God's agápe departs, the coin gamer is left with whatever remnant of human love that can co-exist with an established root of bitterness—not much.

Jack and Jill believe that the problem with their marriage is the failure of the other to admit to a wrong; or because the other does not realize that the damage he does. But eventually they independently conclude that they are no simply longer in love, and they are right about that. Their marriage counselor says that their problem is communication and lack of empathy. But the real problem is relational sin, the sins of both of them.

From the world's perspective, the coins are essentially insignificant. They are nothing but offenses for which the offending party is guilty and the offending party is deserving of the con-

14. See John 14:21,23, quoted above.

15. First John 4:8 "...God is love [agápe]"

demnation represented by the coins. Jack and Jill believe that if they can make sense of who did what and let the blame fall where it is supposed to fall (on the other spouse), then they can unravel what has happened and get back to where they were and learn to love again and maybe save their family.

If only they could communicate better, couldn't they work it out? What communication skills did Jack and Jill have to learn to fall in love in the first place? How long did it take them to learn how to caress, how to hold hands, how to make love or how to make breakfast for each other? What instruction did they need? Very little to be sure. So what has been lost? Communication skills? No. Love has been lost.

The world's way is to fix it by unraveling, explaining, venting and assigning blame. But this is no fix at all. And sometimes better communication skills simply result in much better controlled over an argument. The world's way is useless because although it may the overt relational sins, it does not address the root cause of emotional separation: criticism and unforgiveness. Love is impossible when these two sins remain and they are sleepers.

Marriages are healed by obeying scripture and eradicating sin because what saves marriages is the same thing that created them in the first place: love. It is the original spark, the chemistry, real, warm actual human love that heals marriages, not method and real love is empowered by the presence of Christ. And the presence of Christ requires the relinquishment of sin.



ENDLESS LOVE

Chapter 6

Reproof or Criticism?

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
REPROOF AND CRITICISM

Does the biblical admonition not to criticize or condemn mean that we must never offer admonition or reproof?

Not at all. Reproof is not the same thing as criticism and scripture speaks well of reproof:

He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, But he who ignores reproof goes astray.¹

And when God reproves us, we should receive it well:

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.²

We are reproofed through scripture.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...³

Genuine reproof should be received with thanksgiving, appreciation and with favor.

1. Proverbs 10:17

2. Proverbs 23:7 ... For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...

3. Second Timothy 3:16

He who rebukes a man will afterward
find ... favor.⁴

What is the difference between reproof and criticism? The criticism of Matthew 7:1 carries an element of condemnation, whereas, biblical reproof contains no element of condemnation. That is the reason why reproof is received with favor and criticism is received with disfavor. Thus, how the words are received is a good indication of whether the statement is reproof or criticism.

But the first thing to consider in determining whether a statement is reproof or criticism is the intent of the speaker. Why were the words said? Were they intended to edify or to vindicate? Were they intended to warn or to disparage. Were they spoken to express the emotions of the speaker or to benefit the relationship? Does the speaker intend to bless the hearer or to prove him wrong?

If the words were spoken to edify but the speaker knew that they would be received as criticism, then what was the purpose of the words? Critical words tear down; they do not build up. Good faith reproof is useless when it is taken as critical, so why say it?

No matter what the motive of the reprover may be, if the hearer receives the words as destructive criticism, they effectively become exactly that. Useless words that neither edify nor bless nor warn should not be spoken even if they are well intended. It is certainly true, however, that words spoken with the genuine intent to reprove may first be received as critical but later be appreciated as good faith reproof.

4. Proverbs 28:23

It is a fool who refuses to receive well intended rebuke and the words are wasted on him:

A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.⁵

But the one who continually speaks words that are received as critical will become odious.

A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping...⁶

In order to be effective biblical reproof, the words must be intended to edify or to warn *and* be understood to be received favorably, even if the favor comes later. Unless the hearer hears the words as good faith reproof, they are useless and the hearer remains blind to the content of the reproof.

Reproof given righteously to a willing ear will be received with no defensiveness. Here is a (real life) example of a righteous response to a friend's righteous reproof:

“You are a true friend who could be honest about my unwanted comments. That is an area for me that needs more work.”

5. Proverbs 17:10

6. Proverbs 27:5

A response like this comes from someone with self-respect, sufficient self-respect not to fear the admission of a wrong. It is the weak person, the person who lacks self-respect who must defend. Nor does a response like this come from someone burdened with an unrighteous pride that must be defended.

Humility is the sister of self-respect; and those two are pillars of righteousness. If there is a devil in hell, it is surely his goal to substitute vanity and pride for self-respect.

If the party who received the reproof in the above example had been weak, the reproof, though righteously given, could have destroyed the relationship and driven the reprovved party behind a wall of defense licking wounds that were not there.

When dealing with someone who is weak, remember first that he or she may not aware of it. Be *brief*. Stop speaking immediately when it becomes evident that the other party is not listening because the words that you intend to be reproof are probably now seen as purely critical. The more critical words the other party hears, the more hardened he is likely to become. An excellent rule is not to speak to the sensitive issue until the other is ready to discuss it. And then speak only briefly.

Unwelcome remarks progressively close the door to productive discussion and push the marital opponent into emotional detachment, behind a wall of defense and into a separate world where, because of a history of relational sin, real communication is simply impossible.



Chapter 7

Defensiveness

DEFENSIVENESS IS AS MUCH A
DEFENSE AGAINST TRUTH AS A
DEFENSE AGAINST SLANDER

Critical words are painful because they are an assault upon one's self-perception.

Self-perception is governed in large part by the opinions of others. Each of us lives in a matrix, a complex of relationships, and who we are or who we think we are is often defined by where we fit into that complex. Where and how we fit is determined to a large extent by the acceptance or the rejection of others.

The largest contributor to self-perception is one's spouse. Each spouse relies on the other spouse for the support necessary for his or her own self-perception. Indeed, it is this very acceptance that becomes a pillar of the marriage because acceptance is the core of love and love is the core of the marriage. Criticism and unforgiveness are the opposite of acceptance. It is for this reason that scripture condemns criticism and unforgiveness with such severity.

It is really quite astounding that some people criticize their spouses and expect love in return.

It is painful when anyone assaults our self-perception with critical, complaining, condemnatory words. Words of this nature are rejections of who we are; they are threatening and they are sin.¹ Nevertheless, scripture tells us that we are to receive

1. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not..."

them without taking offense.² Scripture forbids criticism and condemnation from both directions, both from the speaker and from the hearer. They should never be spoken initially and they should never be spoken in response to an attack. But they are spoken and when they are the hearer should leave the offense on the table and never pick it up.

Never keep score.

The Wall

The man or woman who is forced to defend himself constructs a conceptual wall that protects him or her from verbal assault.

The wall is a mixture of justifications, past offenses and counter-criticisms. Each of these elements has a use. Each counter-criticism is effective not only to injure the assaulting party, but also to bolster justification, which is the true strength of the wall. The past offenses (coins) are the tips of the arrows that are fired back into the assaulting party. Insults are available in the event that the supply of coins is exhausted. Sometimes the wall is loud and sometimes it is quiet, but every time its purpose is to protect the defending party from criticism and condemnation. Without criticism and condemnation, there is no reason for the wall.

The tragedy of the wall is that it is so very effective. It blocks out not only actual, destructive criticism and condemnation, but all *perceived* threats as well including well-intended reproof. The wall of defense stops everything, good and bad.

2. First Corinthians 13:4,5 “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs...”

The wall of defense is destructive to the person who uses it because it protects him from considering his own failings and enables him to construct a perception of himself that is not grounded in reality. It can become, if you will, a bubble of pride. The more the bubble is inflated, the more vulnerable it becomes. And the more vulnerable it becomes, the stronger the wall has to be to protect it and the more effective it is to enable the defender to construct whatever version of reality is most pleasing.

If the weakness that is made imperceptible by the wall is sin, the wall is “protecting” the defender from confession, repentance and forgiveness because confession (admission of guilt) is necessary to be right with God and right with others:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.³

Instead of utilizing confession and forgiveness to deal with sin and to balance the equities in his life, the defensive person uses the wall and perhaps the coins and condemnations, denials and justifications, counter-measures or ridicule that make up the wall. Bad choice.

The defensive person is a weak person because he cannot allow himself to perceive himself as less than what he has created himself to be. The defensive person has to have a wall.

Humility

Humility is the antidote to the natural tendency to construct the wall. Humility, at its core, is self-respect and respect for others. It fosters clarity of understanding and accuracy of perception.⁴ The wall of defense protects the vulnerable and weak person who must rely upon self-deceptions to obtain emotional equanimity.

Humility, on the other hand, is the opposite of the wall of defense. Humility is a place of certainty, a place of accurate self-perception. When we arrive at this place, piercing words do not pierce for long because we are resting self-respect upon reality and reality “is what it is” no matter what anyone says about it. And if the piercing words are accurate, the humble person will accept them with thanksgiving and utilize them for emotional and spiritual growth.

Humility always recognizes that there may be some truth in what is being said. Humility takes no offense and has no edifice of pride. Instead, it receives all that has been said with open minded care and quietly accepts that part that is true and rejects that part that is false—and has the wisdom to tell the difference.

There is always value in reproof, even if it is no more than the fact that someone considered it necessary to give it.

4. Romans 12:3 “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

... Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid...⁵

To relinquish defensiveness is to permit one's ego to be sanded down to who one truly is, and to start from that point, the point of sound judgment and reality—sound judgment and reality that is not based solely on the opinions of others.

This is the biblical process of sanctification.⁶ It is the relinquishment of pride for the purpose of gaining well-grounded self-respect. It is the surrendering of all misconceptions and no longer perpetuating pride and in its place establishing the accuracy of understanding and clear vision. This process results in the realization that the wall is not only not necessary, but a serious hindrance as well.

Tearing down the wall of defensiveness may feel like death at first because it means the death of pride and pride is inevitably equated with ourselves. Pride is our self-perception. One may fear that after the sanding there will be nothing left. But, in fact, there is always something left and that something is much larger than it appears because, for the Christian, the nugget that remains contains the presence of Christ and His peace.

The relinquishment of the wall of defense is not death. It is life. It is life because without the wall there is truth, peace and freedom. The wall of defense constrains more than it defends. There is no freedom behind that wall. True freedom is to be at that place where the wall is not necessary.

5. Proverbs 12:1

6. See Second Peter Chapter 1

What can the other spouse do to remove the wall? The answer is in scripture. The wall was erected to defend against condemnations and critical words, which can take the form of repeated complaints, digs and expressions of dissatisfaction. The way to remove the wall is to render it unnecessary by accepting the spouse with an unconditional acceptance.

One renders the wall to be unnecessary by never speaking critical, condemnatory words, by never complaining, by never reminding, nagging or being sarcastic because all of those things are forms of criticism.

And that is Matthew 7:1, “Judge not...”

Matthew 7:1 is the scriptural method for the breaching of the wall of defense. It was written to show how defensive walls can be rendered useless by aggrieved spouses who are willing to yield to scripture in spite of their injuries.



Chapter 8

Scriptural Confrontation

CONFRONTING SOMEONE
SCRIPTURALLY

When a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh.¹ Therefore, when one spouse does not obey scripture, that spouse is requiring the other spouse to bear his sin.

The wife who bears the sins of her husband in silence and continually forgives him will grow significantly in spiritual strength, but at the same time she is married to a man who is relationally inadequate. She is married to a husband who does not meet her deepest needs.

Should she remain silent? No.

The husband who must bear the criticism, dissatisfaction or unforgiveness of a wife whose needs appear to be impossible to meet will grow spiritually and grow in patience, but she is forcing him to be married to half a wife.

Should he remain silent? No.

Matthew 18:15 teaches that scriptural confrontation following an offense is not only permitted but it is required.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.²

1. Mark 10:8

2. Matthew 18:15 † This is the “confrontational scripture.”

The Scriptural Reason for the Confrontation

Typical to scripture, the approach regarding confrontation is the opposite of that of the world because the value system is different. For instance in the scriptural way, vindication is a by-product, not a goal and retribution is non-existent for us.³ Relationships, however, are everything because relationships are acceptance and unconditional scriptural acceptance (agape)⁴ is what God is.⁵

Scripture (the Word of God) is like an extremely bright light coming from the Creator.⁶ It lights up the night. It lights up everything. It shines both forward and backward in time. The place that the light comes from is the cross; the source of the light is Jesus Christ and the light itself is agape. Jesus Christ is living agape, total love.

So, scripture is often the opposite of the world because its value system is different, but it is not always in opposition to the world. Where the value system of scripture coincides with the world there is no opposition.

3. Romans 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

4. First Corinthians 13:5,6 “...love [agape] is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...”

5. First John 4:8 “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love [agape]”

6. John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Confrontation is an example of where the value system of scripture and the value system of the world coincide, because confronting a sin that is injuring a relationship is needful and at times necessary. Where scripture and world part company is not whether the sin should be confronted, but how the confrontation should take place and, more importantly, its goal.

Matthew 18:15, the confrontational scripture, gives us the goal of the scriptural confrontation. It tells us that the goal of the confrontation is to win back the very person who has wronged us. It is the person who wrongs us who is to be won back, not the other way around.

If your brother sins, go and show him
his fault in private; if he listens to you,
you have won your brother.⁷

The confrontational scripture is not for “telling someone off.” It is precisely the opposite. It is for winning them back again. The scriptural confrontation is done for the purpose of re-establishing the relationship when it is the other party who has damaged the relationship in the first place!

In this respect, scripture is the opposite of the world’s way because its values are different. Scripture places its primary value on the relationship itself, whereas the world places its primary value on vindication. Scripture recognizes that the one who committed the sin against the relationship (the relational sin) is the weaker brother, so scripture calls upon the other, the stronger, to initiate and to heal. Scripture recognizes that to demand vindication of the weaker brother will sever the relationship

7. Matthew 18:15

further. It is as if some spiritual intruder (an insult or an injury) had come into your home and grabbed your baby (the relationship). Scripture says, “Get the baby! Forget about the intruder.”

Winning the person who has injured us back again does not necessarily include correcting or working out the behavior that prompted the confrontation. The goal of the biblical confrontation is not to inform someone that he is hurtful or insulting or inconsiderate because he is already aware of that. If He is not aware of it and he is righteous, then a simple word from the injured party will be sufficient.

The goal of the biblical confrontation is to create a forum for biblical reproof where there is conflict. The goal is to create productive dialogue that will address the original wrong, result in forgiveness and reconcile the parties with no lingering resentments.

From a life-long relationship with Christ to a passing acquaintance, relationships are everything in scripture. God is a God of relationships. Indeed, God is so much a God of relationships He *is* a relationship (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Accordingly, God is agápe⁸ and agápe is acceptance, total, complete and unconditional acceptance.⁹ Relationships are everything in scripture because they are the only way that agápe can

8. First John 4:8 “...God is [Agápe]”

9. First Corinthians 13:2,6,-8 “And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith...but do not have agápe, I am nothing... agápe does not take into account a wrong suffered...bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things...”

be expressed. The expression of agápe is very important because agápe is what God *is*. “God is agápe.”¹⁰ So God is expressed in relationships.

Relationships that contain agápe are a manifestation of the presence of God. God may be worshiped, known, studied, followed, obeyed and prayed to, but all of those acts are things that we do to relate to Him or to honor Him. They are not manifestations of Him. What God actually *is* is agápe. God is therefore manifested when agápe is expressed. So how do we enjoy the presence of God? We agápe because that is what He is. What is agápe? Agápe is total acceptance.¹¹ That is the reason why criticism and condemnation are sin. Criticism and condemnation inhibit the presence of God because they are the opposite of agápe.

Are you a Christian? Try it for yourself. Try living with total acceptance and complete forgiveness for a week and see what happens to your spiritual life and your relationships. That means recognizing sin and avoiding it or avoiding the person who commits it. But never criticize either internally or externally. Never permit yourself to judge another or come to the conclusion that someone is a sinner or somehow “bad.”

Relationships are not only the most important thing. Relationships are the only thing. It is for this reason that scripture skips over the attribution of fault (blame) and goes directly to the real value: the relationship. Whether the relationship is our relationship with Jesus Christ which is marred by our sin or whether it is our relationship with our spouse which is marred by our selfishness, relationships, in God’s eyes, are everything.

10. First John 4:8

11. See First Corinthians 13.

Think about it. Where there is agápe there is a relationship because agápe in order to agápe there has to be a relationship. Jesus Christ became sin for us and died in our place on the cross. Why? Because God so “agáped” the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.¹² So, the cross was an expression of love. Love is relational. What is eternal life? Eternal life is knowing God.¹³ Knowing God is a relationship.

What is the key to all life and godliness, virtue and righteousness? Is theology the key? Hard work? Study? Commitment? Faith? Worship? Proper doctrine? No. The key to life, Godliness, virtue and righteousness is a relationship. The key is knowing Jesus Christ, a relationship:

...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him...
for by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature...¹⁴

Everything pertaining to life and godliness comes from knowing Him and knowing Him is a relationship. Eternal life and everything pertaining to life and godliness rests upon a relationship. Why? Because God is agápe and agápe, which is total acceptance, is a relationship.

12. John 3:16 “For God so loved [agape] the world...”

13. John 17:3 “And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

14. Second Peter 1:3,4

Scriptures that relate to the healing of relationships point first to the sins of unforgiveness and the critical spirit that ruin them, and then they point to the cure, which is agápe (acceptance in spite of the sin).

Expressing agápe either to God or to man is the way that we experience the actual presence of God. No wonder Christ commanded us to agápe one another.^{15†} And we cannot judge, grudge and agape at the same time.

It is for this reason that the goal of a confrontation is to re-establish the relationship, not to express dissatisfaction and not for the purpose of providing an opportunity of one party to vent or to otherwise set forth his case.

It is here that scripture wipes away the last vestige of retribution and self-assertion and instead goes directly to the gold, the relationship itself. In the eyes of the world, a confrontation of this nature (a confrontation without self-assertion, demand or accusation) is an exercise in futility; it is impotent.

But the results that it produces when applied consistently are astounding.

15. John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” † Note the magnificent precision of scripture and the profundity. This simple command to His disciples fits precisely with Matthew 7:1 and First Corinthians 13 written decades later and forms the basis not only for the friendship of the disciples but for all godly relationships.

This is the image of Christ to which we are destined.¹⁶ Christ tells us to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who spitefully use us¹⁷ and this is where it happens. This is where obedience hurts. This is where we do what He tells us when everything inside of us screams for the opposite. This is where we love the unloveable, forgive the unjust and refuse to criticize actual sin. Here is where faith is put to the acid test. This is where we do it *just because He said so*.

And, within the scope of the verbal/emotional conflict that is sometimes marriage, this is where we die to self.¹⁸

But do we really die? Christ tells us precisely the opposite:

For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.¹⁹

The life that we find in Christ is not simply being alive in this world. The life that we find is *His* life;²⁰ and His life is lived and experienced in the here and now.²¹ It is this life that brings

16. Romans 8:29 “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.”

17. Luke 6:28 “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which spitefully use you.” (KJV)

18. Matthew 16:24 “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me [to yield to Me], let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me...’”

19. Matthew 16:25

20. John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’”

21. John 17:3, “These things Jesus spoke...” “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

irresistible agápe into the heart, and it is agápe alone that can win the family back again. It is God who restores the love that the errant spouse has relinquished and God does it through Himself, through agápe expressed by us.

Correcting Bad Behavior

The goal is to re-establish the relationship *first*, before the behavior is corrected. Why? Because the behavior cannot be sincerely corrected unless the relationship is re-established. Words, threats and promises cannot truly correct behavior. Only *desire* can correct behavior and it is the relationship that creates the *desire*, because relationship is *valued*. Where there is no relationship, there is no value. It is for this reason that the goal is to re-establish the relationship *first* and then, if the relationship itself does not correct the behavior, the door is open to discussion because the relationship has been healed.

Therefore, the aggrieved party should make a decision in advance not to retaliate, not to criticize and to say nothing that the other party will not sincerely hear. This may not yield a significant result immediately. But it will begin to re-open the door for a productive discussion at a later time.

If only one party yields to scriptural commands, look for a progressive openness in the other party and look for the beginnings of the return of love in the party who yields. If both parties yield, then the result will be evident in the stark difference between this confrontation and previous, non-scriptural, confrontations. True yielding on the part of both will eventually result in the restoration of the love that was lost. And when love has been restored it covers the sin that caused it to depart.²²

22. First Peter 4:8 “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

Fidelity

Where there is a continuing marital conflict, certain things must be addressed before any effective reconciliation can occur. The very first thing to address in any confrontation is fidelity. If fidelity is an issue then fidelity will have to be resolved first, because fidelity is an absolute requirement for trust and trust is essential to the oneness (the relationship) described in scripture.²³ Infidelity is a bar to sincere reconciliation.

Fidelity is commanded in numerous scriptures, the most prevalent of which is the sixth commandment, “Do not commit adultery.”²⁴

The sin of adultery is classically described as sexual intercourse with someone other than one’s spouse. However, adultery is not limited to physical illicit sex. For instance, Christ taught that to look upon a woman and lust after her is to commit adultery in one’s heart²⁵ and the admonition against spiritual adultery is prevalent throughout scripture.²⁶

To adulterate means to introduce a foreign substance into something that was pure before the adulteration occurred. When the adultery is in the form of illicit sex, the family itself can become physically adulterated with the seed of a third party

23. Mark 10:8 “...a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

24. Exodus 20:14

25. Matthew 5:28 “I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

26. James 4:4 “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?” See Romans 8:7–8; 2 Timothy 4:10; First John 2:15–17, Jeremiah 3:20; Isaiah 1:21, 57:8; and Ezekiel 16:30.

or, if the adulterer is the husband, the family's seed may be used to impregnate another family with a foreign seed or start a new one without a father.

But adulteration can occur without sex. Indeed, women are can be more offended by an improper relationship between their husband and another woman than actual physical adultery. Perhaps many have this view because they recognize that it is the relationship that is the key. Thus, the marital relationship may be adulterated by improper extramarital non-sexual relationships, such as flirting.

And the clear water of agape can be adulterated by words. Insults and threats of divorce are adulterations and breaches of fidelity.

First Timothy 3:12 refers to deacons as being men who are beyond reproach:

Let deacons be husbands of only one
wife...

The full meaning of this passage is lost in the English translation. The original Greek for “husbands of one wife”²⁷ is “one woman man.” Thus, the meaning embraces not only the legal status of being married to one woman, but it also includes the concept of a husband who does not extend or consent to any communication with the opposite sex that carries questionable implications.

27. First Timothy 3:12 “...μίας [one] γυναικος [woman] ανδρες [man]...”

Problems may arise in this regard when the two spouses hold different opinions as to what flirting is or when they differ on what they consider to be improper.

One spouse may hold a liberal view and the other spouse may hold a conservative view. But whether one is right and the other is wrong is irrelevant to the relationship because the issue to the relationship is trust, not right or wrong. There is no absolute standard for relating to other women or other men. The goal is to establish trust in the heart of one's spouse, and trust will not be established by operating within the scope of one's own opinion of what is proper without regard to the opinion of one's spouse.

Fortunately, the solution is simple. The solution is a mutual relinquishment of rights.

The husband agrees that all of his relationships with the opposite sex will remain within the parameters established by his wife. That is, if she would not approve, then he does not do it. And the wife agrees that all of her relationships with the opposite sex will remain within the parameters established by her husband. If he would not approve, then she does not do it. This common understanding and trust must be present before any meaningful reconciliation can occur and must be the subject of a separate discussion which, if necessary, is accompanied by apologies, repentance, forgiveness and re-commitment.

No boundary of fidelity established by the other spouse should ever be viewed as unreasonable because the goal of the boundary is not to conform to an external standard of reasonableness. The goal is to establish trust and *whatever* has to be

done to establish trust must be done, and done with sincerity and commitment. There is no unreasonable boundary when one deals with fidelity and the relationship is everything.

Expressions of Love and Respect to the Wife

Scripture teaches that it is the husband's duty to love his wife.²⁸ The reason for this is that God has created woman to be loved and to need love. So scripture teaches husbands to love their wives. This is not simply a rule of behavior; it is a reality.

Love is like air to women. Love must be expressed and expressed constantly. With it she becomes comfortable. Some husbands believe that the wife should make herself comfortable without expressions of love because expressions of love can be burdensome and because the husband does not feel or understand the same need for love. Ironically, the best way, if not the only way, for a husband to engender comfort and respect in his wife is to continually express love to her.

The motivation for this expression of love may begin as a duty but it becomes a pleasure because it is an expression of love and mutual love is always a pleasure. The more the husband expresses love, the more he actually loves and the more he actually loves the more he expresses love... It is a spiral going upward.

Since the wife was created differently from the husband, her needs are different. The effect of what the husband says or does will be tempered by her focus and her needs. Her biblical orientation is dependence and love,^{29†} and she receives what he says

28. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Ephesians 5:28 "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies."

29. † Scripture teaches that the wife is to be loved (Ephesians 5:25)

in the context of that orientation. If the husband fails to voluntarily express love continually, she understands him to say that his love is diminishing. If she is a biblical keeper of the home,³⁰ this understanding can be quite threatening to her because her husband is (or is supposed to be) the structural and financial support of the family.³¹

His failure to continually express love can undermine her self-confidence and it can effect how she relates to him. It skews what she understands him to be communicating. It prevents her from being fully balanced and causes her to be unhappy. And when she is unhappy, everyone is unhappy because she is the keeper of the home and everything in the home revolves around her.

Many husbands view this love-characteristic of wives to be unreasonable and overly burdensome especially in view of his very challenging obligation to support his family. The tyranny of daily fatigue can strip the idea of romance from his thoughts

“Husbands love your wives”) and she is to be provided for by the husband (First Timothy 5:8, see below) because she is to be the keeper of the home (Titus 2:5 Wives are “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands”). The scriptural function of the wife is to nurture, to keep the home, and be protected and provided for by her husband. It is the faithful execution of her office that engenders love from her husband. And it is the faithful execution of his office, which includes loving his wife, that engenders love from his wife.

30. Titus 2:3,5 “Older women likewise are to be...teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers [keepers] at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands that the Word of God may not be dishonored.”

31. First Timothy 5:8 “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

as well as hers. But expressions of love engender love in both the speaker and the hearer, and love is life.³² † God is love and God is spiritual (eternal) life.³³

It is astounding how many men can blame their wives when they have simply failed to meet her most basic need.

Expressions of Respect and Love to the Husband

Scripture teaches that it is the wife's duty to show respect to her husband.³⁴ The reason for this is because God has created men to require respect. And scripture teaches that we should love one another.³⁵ So scripture teaches that wives should respect and love their husbands, but for husbands the emphasis is on respect.

Respect is like air to men. With it they can be comfortable. They can respect themselves and respect others. Respect must be expressed by a wife with appreciation directly to the husband and the absence of complaining and dissatisfaction. Some wives believe that they can compel a husband to love them by complaining, but the best way to release a husband's love to his wife is to show him respect and the best way to destroy it is continual expressions of dissatisfaction.

32. † God is love (First John 4:8 "God is love") and God is life (John 14:6 "I am...life"). Therefore love is life. Love is an expression of the presence of God and God is life (John .

33. John 14:6 "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..."

34. Ephesians 5:33 "...and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband."

35. John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

The more respect the wife shows to the husband, the more comfortable the husband becomes. The more comfortable the husband becomes, the easier it is for him to show love to his wife. The more love he shows to his wife, the more she will respect him and the more she respects him the more love he feels. It is a spiral going upward and eventually the sins that caused the problems are forgotten because love covers a multitude of sins.³⁶

Since her husband was created differently from her, his needs are different. And the effect of what she says or does will be tempered by his focus and his needs. His orientation is independence and respect, and he receives what she says in the context of that orientation. If the wife fails to show respect, he becomes threatened and detached because his own self-respect rests largely upon the respect that his wife gives to him. He can deal with a wife who does not show him respect, but he cannot love her. Complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction are assaults upon what God has made him to be because God has stamped into the biblical husband the need to provide for his family and that means to make his wife content. Every expression of discontent is an assault upon what God has made him to be. Every complaint is a statement that says, “You failed.” Men can withstand only a certain number of these statements.

There was once a husband who was very shy and physically weak. He had been married a biblical wife for years. She was a biblical wife because she had learned Christ’s commands and she kept them.³⁷ She was careful to show respect to her husband and never criticized him. One day she had trouble opening a jar

36. First Peter 4:8 “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

37. John 14:21 “He who has My commands and keeps them...”

and asked him for help. He struggled with it but he finally got it open, and she commented on his strength. The next night she did it again. And she did it again the next night and each time she commented on his strength. The following Saturday afternoon she heard an unusual clanging sound in the garage. She opened the door and saw something that she had never seen before. It was her husband weightlifting. Her encouragement had inspired him. This power to inspire through respect is perhaps the least understood “girl power” that women possess, but it is by far the most effective.

Did his experience with the jars make him a new man? No. *She* had made him a new man. God had given her the opportunity to participate in the creation of a new and finer man. She had walked with God. Her husband had always been painfully aware of his physical weakness and he had always had the time and the wherewithal to fix it, but never did. All he needed was her inspiration and appreciation.

Men are fully aware of the inspiration given by a wife or a girlfriend. It is no theory; it is reality and men feel it. It is immensely strengthening and empowering. History and literature often recount it. We have all seen it at one time or another, but men and women see it differently. Women see it as cute or sympathetic or loving. But men see it as empowering. It is a wife’s picture taped on the control panel of a World War II bomber or the blurred photograph of a freckle faced kid-of-a-girl pinned to the wall in a dorm room next to the bed of some shy geeky freshman who is destined to turn the world around. Ladies, you have no idea of the power you hold. Some of you use it like a five year old with a loaded pistol. And some men treat expressions of love on par with feeding the dog. Let us all open our eyes to Truth. A lifetime of contentment is in the balance—and that is to say nothing of the *family* that will live or die.

The Confrontation Generally

Scripture avoids any specific direction regarding what words to use in a confrontation.³⁸ But it does teach that the purpose of the confrontation is to win back the brother who has committed the offense³⁹ and thereby re-establish the relationship. Christ has commanded us to love (agápe) one another, not to blame one another.⁴⁰ Therefore the goal is to love the person who did the injury *and to be loved* by that person. One does not create love by criticism and condemnation.

The words that we choose for this confrontation must be wholly non-accusatory and also they must not be correctional, because correctional words are critical words to an unwilling ear. They must not be framed so as to inform the other party as to how he should correct his behavior unless, of course, he is genuinely open to discuss it, in which case no confrontation is necessary.

One very effective non-confrontational way to approach the discussion is to frame the initial approach as a request for help. For instance, one may confront by saying “Can you help me

38. Proverbs 30:19 “There are three things which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the sky, The way of a serpent on a rock, The way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.” This scripture may at first seem out of place because it speaks of courting and of love, not confrontation. But it is not out of place because that is exactly what scripture is telling us to do, to woo, to win back, not to destroy.

39. Matthew 18:15 “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

40. Matthew 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love [agape] one another, even as I have loved [agape] you, that you also love [agape] one another.”

understand what you meant when you said ____” or “I understand how you feel when you said ____ but what prompted you to say it?”

Another non-confrontational approach may be “I get the feeling that ____ “ or simply “Can we make this right?” Or “What do you think about ____?” or “It made me feel hurt when you said ____ . Can you help me overcome these feelings. Did you really mean to say that?” The goal is to ensure that the other party is not offended or threatened so that a productive, accepting discussion can follow rather than an argument. We are dealing with feelings and emotions here, not words.

Remember the goal. Non-accusatory words and soft answers⁴¹ disarm the defensive spouse and create a common ground for mutually beneficial discussion. The goal is to win back the errant brother or sister and re-establish the relationship. An excellent relationship is love in its biblical context. Agápe is the power behind all of the loves.

On the other hand, the worldly, conventional approach will create an argument. For instance, a “You are insulting me again” or a “Don’t you ever think of anyone but yourself” or a “Can’t you be nice??” is an accusation and will often be met with a counter accusation and the walls go up. So one must ask one’s self “Do I want to fight or do I want to reconcile?” God

41. Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”

has given to us all things necessary for life and godliness⁴² and made us ministers of reconciliation.⁴³† The scriptural goal is reconciliation.

Secular psychology takes the biblical approach to confrontation because experience has shown that criticism is treated as a threat. It causes people to become defensive. When only acceptance comes from the counselor, the walls come down. The same is true when the one who is seeking reconciliation is a spouse. Acceptance dissolves walls. Soft, non-condemnatory statements defuse the angry response.⁴⁴ The same is true for correctional “suggestions” when the erring party is not ready to be corrected.

42. Second Peter 1:3 “...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him...”

43. Second Corinthians 5:18 “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” † This passage refers to the reconciliation of men to God through Christ. Effecting reconciliation between people is another expression of this ministry.

44. Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath.”

It is the Holy Spirit who has been given the task of convicting of sin, not us.⁴⁵ When we try it, we just get in the way. God does not permit us to be the accuser because we are just as guilty and as fallible as the one whom we accuse.^{46†} The only difference is that our sin may not be the same.

When we see the confrontation from the opposite direction, we see that scripture is teaching us that when someone injures another he injures *himself*. It is for this reason that scripture teaches that the whole purpose is to win him back. He is the spiritually weaker party and he is the object of conviction by the Holy Spirit. It may be very difficult to win him back because we must break through the defensive barrier that he has constructed. He is afraid to face what he has done because it is wrong, possibly very wrong. When we accuse or criticize, we take his wrong and point it at him like a pistol and wonder why he defends himself.

45. John 16:7-11 “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

46. Matthew 7:3 “...why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye...first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly...” † Jesus is speaking of biblical reproof. In order to provide biblical reproof, one must first see clearly and seeing clearly requires the removal of one’s own sin. Humility is the key to the removal of sin.

Several, incremental approaches may be necessary with each one slowly widening the space for productive discussion, and never ending with either an insult or a correction. When the relationship has been re-established the errant spouse will correct himself because he will want to.

So, scripture takes an approach that is essentially the opposite of the world. It tells us to heal our errant brother by a confrontation that is really no confrontation at all. It teaches us to heal him by forgiveness, to convict him by blessing and grace, and to win the point by losing. Quite radical to be sure, but this is nothing new.

How wonderful is the wisdom of God!
That the seed of the woman, born of a
lowly virgin, brought forth in a stable,
spending His days in affliction, misery,
and poverty, without any pomp and
splendor, passing some time in a car-
penter's shop, with carpenter's tools, and
afterwards exposed to a horrible and
disgraceful death, should by this way
pull down the gates of hell, subvert the
kingdom of the devil, and be the ham-
mer to break in pieces that power which
he [Satan] had so long exercised over the
world!⁴⁷

God's values are different. His goal is love and it is through love and love alone that we win. The confrontational scripture is there in order make sure that he who has injured is aware of

47. Charnock, Stephen, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, Minneapolis Minnesota) originally published 1797, p. 323.

all issues, to provide him an opportunity to voluntarily make it right and to win him back again. It works only to the extent that each party yields to scripture.

The reason why the scriptural way works is because in the scriptural confrontation, the sinning brother is not being threatened by the opposing party's criticisms, complaints or condemnations. Instead, he is being convicted by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ As long as the offended party does not interpose himself and assume the role of the Holy Spirit by complaints and corrections, the only way that the offending party can escape conviction is to repent, apologize and cease to sin.

The trick is to never push the other party into a defensive stance, but open the door to a resolution. We must place the other party in the position where he understands that he has nothing to fear. This can be accomplished only by being non-critical and non-accusatory. Hence, Jesus teaches us never to criticize or condemn.⁴⁹

It may well take time for the injured party to forgive and come to the place where a truly scriptural confrontation can occur. But obedience to His word results in His presence and results in His strength to forgive and to love. God provides the power to forgive. And if we are not willing to forgive, He requires only that we are willing to be made willing and then He makes us to be willing. God does it; not us. He has to because we can't. We can't create love. Only God can do that. Where a marriage is faltering under the weight of a hundreds unresolved offenses only God can heal it and He heals it with love.

48. John 16:8 "...when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." (NASV)

49. Matthew 7:1

Imagine

Imagine for a moment that your spouse sincerely yields to scripture, and does exactly what scripture says to do.

If that were the case, then you would never be condemned; you would never be criticized unless you wanted to be (which is not criticism but constructive advice); you would never hear old wrongs reiterated; you would be fully accepted and appreciated for who you are and forgiveness would come as naturally and peacefully as spring rain—no pain, no pay-back, no resentment, just a free gift. There would be no reminders, no rejection and no regrets. You would be loved with an unconditional love that never ends. You would be fully accepted for who you really are and you would *know* that you could rely on your mate *always*.

Now imagine that *both* parties did that. Imagine that every problem was addressed without retribution, without anger, without justification, without self-defense, without *any* offense and in an environment of complete forgiveness, unconditional acceptance and in a sincere mutually constructive discussion for the sole purpose of resolution for the betterment of the marriage and the family with each party treating the other as better than himself.⁵⁰ Imagine that each party complied with the requests of the other party not because they were reasonable and necessary but because they came from her or from him and compliance was not a duty but an opportunity, each one an opportunity to express love. That is a scriptural Christian marriage and it is possible. It is *inevitable* with complete yielding to His Word of God.

50. Philippians 2:3 “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem [the] other better than themselves.*”

In that environment, agápe flourishes and merges with all of the loves. Agápe is endless love and it is free for the asking and the yielding—yielding not just for the result that comes from the yielding, but yielding because it is yielding to Him. When this occurs we experience His presence and peace. His love becomes like an overflowing river. It is *everywhere*.

Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it.⁵¹

It is for this reason that a decision not to take offense and instead to forgive from the heart is not “sweeping the dust under the rug.” It is precisely the opposite; it is not touching the dust. It is backing away from assuming the role of the Holy Spirit and permitting the sin to remain in the open so that the only One who is truly capable of dealing with it can freely do so.

It is the Holy Spirit who deals with the attributions of fault and the tangled history of all the injuries and vindications. He takes them all, all of the vindications, all of the failures and all of the injuries, all the violated rights and all of the just retributions, all the anger and all the hatred, and all the conditions and rejections and rolls them up into a ball of pain and words and pitches it to the cross. At the cross, it encounters the blood of Jesus Christ and melts into a sea of forgiveness.

Love is best.



51. Psalm 119:140

Chapter 9

Restoration of Love

TRUE LOVE CAN BE RESTORED

Real love is rare. And once that love is gone, resurrecting it by willing it into being again is just as fruitless as willing it into being was in the first place. The reason is that true love is outside of our direct control. That is what makes it so very powerful. We can resist it but we can neither create it nor fake it.

With this understanding comes the belief that when love departs, the marriage has passed the point of no return. The loveless marriage is hollow and it survives only by the hardness of its shell. So, why go on pretending?

God's answer is that He never intended us to pretend. Nor does He intend us to simply endure. His intention is to restore the love that was lost or to create a new, deeper love. God knows, as we do, that it is only true love that will restore the marriage because it is love alone that makes a marriage wonderful.

With the power of the living God, there is never a point of no return in a marriage because He is able to restore the original love. He *is* love,¹ so when His presence returns His love returns as well. And nowhere is the presence of God more evident than when it manifests itself with the resurrection of a dead love or the creation of a new one.

1. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

In order to cause the return of a lost love, one must first look at where it went and why. As we have seen, sin inhibits the presence of God because God dwells only with those who keep His word:²

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.³

And again:

He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth [agápe] Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself [make Myself known] to him.⁴

When we sin, we breach scripture and limit the very Source of agápe because we relinquish His presence. This is especially true if our sins are relational sins directly against love, such as judgment and unforgiveness.

2. This limitation of the presence of God within is not related to salvation because once salvation occurs, it will never be revoked. Instead these two passages refer to the experiential presence and peace of God in this life.

3. John 14:23. This scripture teaches that keeping God's Word is a prerequisite to God's presence.

4. John 14:21

The Sin of Judgment

Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.⁵

The Sin of Unforgiveness

...if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.⁶

Forgiveness is the knife that cuts away the stuff that kills love. The closer you make the cut, the more you love.

One cannot forgive and remain critical at the same time.

Every friendship, every familial bond and every romantic bond is a kind of love. And these two scriptures tell us that unforgiveness and criticism should not be a part of any relationship, including love. They are adulterations of love. They inhibit the presence of God⁷ and God is the only source of agape.⁸

Perhaps the most evident result of relational sin is emotional separation.

5. Matthew 7:1

6. Matthew 6:14,15

7. John 14:21,23

8. First John 4:8 "God is [agápe]"

Emotional Separation

Emotions are, of course, dynamic and powerful. That is, they change with changing situations and they can alter the very nature of the people experiencing them. Sometimes emotional reactions are so powerful the person who feels them does not fully understand why they occurred or how they could have altered him or her the way they did. Many people believe that we are in control of our emotions, but sometimes emotions are in control of us. Emotions can be gentle and carry us to lovely heights or they can be controlling and relentless.

Relational sin causes emotional separation in the person who commits the sin. The other party who senses the emotional separation may feel prompted to respond in kind. This can create an emotional separation without a word said.

Emotional separation can result from alcohol. Alcohol dulls inhibitions and in doing so facilitates criticism. The residual effects of alcohol are numerous and complex and can remain long after the overt sensation of alcohol has disappeared.

All marriages have times of emotional separation when love is diminished and all marriages have periods of emotional unity as well. But when the emotional separation is deep and prolonged, the marriage may not survive because the very core of marriage is the relationship and the core of the relationship is love. Emotional separation is the opening slice of the wedge that drives spouses apart and relational sin is the sledge hammer that strikes that wedge.

The only real cure for emotional separation is the restoration of love, because love is emotional unity.^{9†} When the bond of love is strong, the deepest emotions can become gentle giants. Only love can create this bond. Indeed, love *is* the bond. So, in order to re-create true emotional unity, one must re-acquire true love.

But how can true love be re-acquired? One cannot simply will true love into existence because true love is outside of ourselves. Love is outside of ourselves because God is love and God is outside of ourselves.

In order to re-acquire love, we must re-acquire the presence of God in both spouses. The presence of God must be re-acquired because God is agápe¹⁰ and agápe empowers all of the human loves, including eros.¹¹ The presence of God is acquired by the eradication of relational sin.¹² Love is re-acquired through righteousness.

9. † Love is emotional unity because love (agape) is unconditional acceptance. See First Corinthians 13.

10. First John 4:8

11. First Corinthians 13:8 “[agápe] never fails.”

12. John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them... [I] will disclose Myself to him.” Also see John 14:23 “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word...and We will come to him, and make our abode with him.”

Two Ways to Restore a Marriage

There is the world's way to restore a marriage and there is God's way. The world's way is to solve the controversies in a failing marriage is by discussing them, unraveling them, assigning fault where appropriate and teaching the parties how to relate—as if the parties never knew how to relate.

God's way is to dissolve the controversies and re-create the love that was lost through the eradication of sin (primarily relational sin). A large part of relational sin is the process used in the way of the world to restore love: reiterating past sin, reliving pain, venting, assigning blame (responsibility) and generally going over the past and examining it. Scripture is diametrically opposed to the way of the world.

The essential difference between the two is that in the world's way, we figure out the problem and fix it by changing behavior. In the scriptural way we admit that we can't really fix anything. All we can do is abstain from sin. So, we abstain from sin and God fixes it. In the world's way it is we who do it. In God's way, it is God who does it. This is the same concept that differentiates the Old and New Testaments.

The World's Way

The world's way analyzes the problem, gives the parties an opportunity to vent and state their case. They give their reasons, make their explanations, and tell what they want to see from the other spouse. A counselor listens, calms, reassures, and gives advice and assignments. Communication is taught and practiced if the parties are not communicating effectively. The parties try to understand how and why they arrived to the place where they find themselves. They try to understand why some-

one did what he did because with understanding the parties can deal with the problems, see that they are not impossible and accommodate the other party.

The world's way treats blame and designations of responsibility as necessary for an accurate perception of reality. It assumes that with understanding and the absence of malice, the parties can move on. The world's way tries to find out what happened and fix it. One of the underlying philosophies is "To understand all is to forgive all." The world's way is to effect some manner of justice and equanimity between the parties. The world's way often addresses the most prevalent problem: communication. The parties are taught that words do injure and they do cause defensive responses and counter-accusations.

This world's method may even include prayer, but the means for healing is the world's method, an unscriptural method for dealing with the existing emotions and their dynamics and interplay. In the world's way there is really no scriptural dynamic because scripture is not the method. Sin is relevant but not stressed because it causes guilt and more emotional entanglement. Unforgiveness and criticism are viewed as inevitable elements of the emotional injury caused by the sin of the other party.

In order create a foundation for a relationship and to structure the work-out, the parties must be taught how to fight fair. They must be able to engage in normal communication in order to continue to exist together and they must learn how to fight properly so that they can fight without having to resort to a marriage counselor.

In the end, all that the world's way can ever do is to encourage people to change behavior because changed behavior is beneficial. It is difficult, however, to change established behavior by doing little more than eliciting a decision to do so especially when the deepest and most powerful emotions are moving the parties in opposite directions. In a troubled marriage, a change in behavior may appear to be all that is required. But it is not simply behavior, but sin, all sin, both spoken and silent sin.

This is the world's way. There are many forms, of course, but generally this is the approach. It is both rational and admirable, and those who use it are in complete good faith. Sometimes the world's way appears to work, but it works only to the extent that it results in the parties following the scriptural paradigm.

The only real cure is the return of the bond and the bond is true love. One cannot reason or behave love back into being. Love is the one thing that the world's way cannot create and love is the one thing that will heal a marriage.

The Scriptural Way

The scriptural way is radically different. The scriptural way ignores the tangle of rights and wrongs altogether and immediately addresses the true reason for the injured relationship and the death of love: sin. In this regard, there may well be overlap between the world's way and the scriptural way if the behavior that the world's way seeks to eradicate is sin.

In each controversy there is an instigator (the one whose sin causes an emotional injury) and there is the injured party (the one who responds). Each spouse is an instigator at one time or

another, and each spouse is an injured party at one time or another. The instigator is at fault for the sin that caused the injury. The injured party is at fault for the sin of taking offense and failing to forgive. Both parties are at fault.

The world's way is all about a balance of rights and teaches that the verbal expression of anger or dissatisfaction (criticism) is a necessary part of healing. The scriptural way is precisely the opposite. The scriptural way ignores the balance of rights and condemns all criticism as sin.

The scriptural way is somewhat like the wife who finally stops trying to re-organize a kitchen drawer and dumps it out and starts entirely new.

The scriptural way ignores the complex arrangement of rights and grudges, passive aggressions, unspoken insults, grudges, and all the very excellent reasons to reject. It forbids them to be reiterated and goes directly to the sin that underlies them because it understands that sin is the entire problem, not just part of the problem. The world's way does not effectively address sin. It addresses the problem itself, and believes that it can solve it, but it cannot because it is addressing the wrong problem.

Scripture skips all of the methods of the world and goes directly to the one and the only key that will really work. That key is love and love cannot exist in the presence of relational sin. Consider the history of the relationship.

When the parties were in love, were they angry? Were they gossiping and slandering? Were they venting? Were they resentful? Were they blaming? Were they demanding their rights? Were they speaking of one another to third parties? Were they holding grudges? Were they complaining? No. Why? Because they were in love. That is the reason why they did not do those things.

They didn't fall in love because they did not do all of those bad things. It was the opposite. They didn't do all of those bad things *because* they were in love. Love is the key, not the result. It was love that created the good behavior, not vice versa.

What happened was that they were in love and after a while the imperfections of the other spouse became known and things like grudges, anger and resentments crept in, and the honeymoon ended.

So, let's get real. Is this scriptural method going to create a marriage where the honeymoon never ends? Is scripture telling us that we can live in constant effortless harmony? Are we really saying that love never has to end?

Yes. We are talking effortless harmony and endless love. We are talking about tapping into a love so powerful that it paid the penalty for the sins of the entire world.

But does that apply to every day husband and wife love?

Yes.

Where did the bad things that destroyed love come from? Scripture tells us:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...¹³

Certainly, sins of this nature kill relationships and they must be eradicated before love can be restored. But they are not the only sins. They cause condemnation, criticism and unforgiveness and these are sins as well. They also kill relationships (and perhaps more effectively). All of the sin must be eradicated.

We are not fragile victims, powerless to overcome the void of a dead relationship. We are children of the living God and we have the power of the Creator at our fingertips. We have only to tap this power by sincere obedience.

But we have to understand what we are tapping. We are not tapping into justification or vindication or revenge. We are not tapping into a self-help method or a forum where our case can be heard. We are not tapping into winning arguments.

We are tapping into love. We are tapping real experiential, powerful supernatural love. We are tapping a love that ignores the past and skips over everything, a love that changes people on the inside, a love that heals, a love that binds, a love that never remembers a wrong, never holds a grudge, a love that never criticizes and always accepts, a love that is new every day, a supernatural love that never ends and never fails.¹⁴ We are

13. Galatians 5:19-21

14. See First Corinthians 13

tapping into God Himself and the instrument that we use to tap into this Power is righteousness, yielded obedience to His Word, by choosing not to sin.

Human loves are fragile. Only the supernatural love of the Creator is invulnerable and constant, but He makes neither His presence nor His supernatural love (agápe) known to the Christian who continues to sin.¹⁵ Hence, the scriptural way is simple. Eradicate sin, especially sins against love, and the presence of God returns with His agápe and that is all that is necessary.

This means the eradication of all relational sin. An aggrieved spouse cannot expect love to return to him or to her if he or she continues to commit relational sins like gossip, abuse, repeated complaining, dissatisfaction, disrespect, flirting, deceit and others. Nor can an aggrieved spouse expect love to return if he or she commits the sins of criticism and unforgiveness. Why? Because relational sins assault the love of the person against whom they are committed *and they destroy the love of the person who commits them.*

The relational sins of criticism and unforgiveness kill the love of the person who commits them in silence. They are private sins. No one knows when we commit these sins and we conceal them. It is for this reason that they are so destructive. A spouse can do all the right things, say all the right things and never let on that love has died—and never know why.

15. John 14:21. “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” See also John 14:23 “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”

The sincere relinquishment of relational sin can turn love back on like water from a spigot. Try it yourself. Cease all internal relational sin, all criticism and all unforgiveness. Cease all blame and totally accept your spouse without reservation of any kind and with all of his or her shortcomings, faults and sin. Cease all outward relational sin such as flirting, gossiping, or insulting and make a sincere and inalterable commitment not to criticize, condemn, blame or hold any resentment either inwardly or outwardly against your spouse *no matter* what for 3 days, and commit to love your spouse to the extent of the love that God gives you, and see what happens.

The “trick” is to understand that your spouse is imperfect and cannot easily see his or her own sin—and that the same is true for both spouses. If we simply accept this and each one fully accepts the other *in spite of* the imperfections, then the bond strengthens.

Each spouse has his or her own strong points and weak points. It is easy for one spouse to condemn the weak points of the other spouse when he or she is not subject to that same failing. But both spouses are imperfect because both are human and God made us to merge in a marriage, so that the weak areas of one spouse are compensated by the strong areas in the other spouse and vice versa. To do this each spouse must fully accept the other’s imperfections and use his or her strengths to compensate for those imperfections. When this occurs, the strong elements of one spouse support, rather than reject, the same weak elements of the other spouse. If both spouses support and accept the weaknesses of each other they become one flesh and

the bond is strong because in doing this (fully accepting) the spouses are exercising agape (agape is total acceptance). When this occurs, a multitude of sins are covered and love flows like a river.

We all have our crosses to bear. We must never criticize another for how he chooses bears his.

Three days of total non-critical acceptance and total forgiveness by both spouses should be enough of a taste of the peace that passes human understanding and the harmony that God brings to a marriage to make both spouses want to try it for another 3 days.

It just gets better and better.



Chapter 10

Genesis

WHERE THE TWIN SINS BEGAN

It is in our nature to determine who is good and who is evil and to judge them for it. This natural inclination to justice is shared by us all, and it is far from new. It is ancient.

From Genesis we learn that there was a tree in midst of the Garden of Eden. This was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree and its fruit, having been made by the Creator, was good because all that God created is good.¹ The tree was a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise.² But God forbade man to eat of the fruit of this tree on pain of death.³

Why?

Because once imperfect man had eaten its fruit and acquired the knowledge of good and evil, he would inevitably cast imperfect judgment not only on what acts were good or what acts were evil, but also upon the persons doing those acts. And in so doing, man would (with imperfect and unrighteous judgment) take the position of God, judging others as good or evil,⁴ valuable or invaluable, condemning them while elevating himself.

1. Genesis 1:31 “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”

2. Genesis 3:7 “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate.”

3. Genesis 3:3 “...from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.”

4. Genesis 3:5 “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes

God did not say that the fruit was poison nor did He say that the fruit itself would kill those who ate it, He said only that they would die *as a result* of eating the fruit. Thus, His warning leaves open the specific reason for their death:

You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.⁵

The problem was not in the tree or in its fruit. The problem was in man. What Eve did not see and what Satan did not tell her, was that neither she nor Adam were created to be able to consume the fruit of the tree. Neither she nor Adam nor we possess the innate ability to use the knowledge of good and evil righteously. We cannot make a truly accurate judgment about someone else. Not only are we blind to all of the facts, but we justify ourselves. Only God can judge.

No matter how the facts develop in any situation, natural man will judge himself right and the other wrong—to the extent that he can—and justify his own conduct. The original sin of Adam and Eve resulted in unrighteous condemnation and criticism of others and justification of self.

Man opens his heart to the winding briars of resentment when he combines the fruits of the tree with his own judgment. No matter what has occurred, natural man will always find a way to explain away what he has done and that explanation will inevitably involve the fault of someone else. With the knowledge of good and evil and the fallen nature man are combined there is practically nothing that man cannot justify in his own mind. History is ample witness to that.

will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

5. Genesis 3:3

The cure for this ill is not to return to the garden and somehow relinquish the knowledge of good and evil, but instead to relinquish judgment and condemnation of others (Matthew 7:1). Because when others are no longer condemned, self-justification becomes impossible and our own sin stares us directly in the face. And when it does, we are forced to deal with it.

The effect of the fruit was evident immediately. The first thing that happened after they ate the fruit was that Adam and Eve concealed themselves.⁶ The second thing happened when God asked Adam, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”⁷ Adam’s response was to utilize his knowledge of good and evil to blame both God and his wife rather than take responsibility himself. “That woman that you gave me, she gave it to me...” (paraphrased).⁸ So The second thing that happened was self-justification and blaming of others. Not much has changed since then.

6. Genesis 3:7 “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.”

7. Genesis 3:10

8. Genesis 3:11 “And the man said, ‘The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree...’”

Another effect of the knowledge of good and evil was to leave us with the responsibility to do what is right. But our imperfection renders it impossible fully comply.⁹ And the failure to comply brings spiritual death.¹⁰

The only answer to this tragedy is Christ:

For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.¹¹

It is Christ who sets us free from the curse:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.¹²

So, Jesus Christ is not just a wise teacher. Jesus Christ is our savior.

Jesus Christ is transforming. The presence of Christ within us transforms us and empowers us to no longer yield to sin. The curse is reversed in Christ. As Adam and Eve died spiritually as

9. Romans 7:18, 19 “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.”

10. Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death...”

11. First Corinthians 15:21,22

12. Romans 8:2

a result of the curse¹³ and we die spiritually as a result of our own sin.¹⁴ But when we trust in Christ, we are made spiritually alive.¹⁵

What is God's purpose in this arrangement? One thing that happens is that with his imperfect nature, man has the option to love. Love can exist only if it is freely expressed and it can be freely expressed only if the person who expresses it can choose not to express it; love must have an option. Love cannot exist without the option not to love. From the imperfection of man and the image of God in which man is made comes the free choice to love. In a marital context man can choose to agápe or to take offense but not both.

It is the fact that the lover chooses to agape when offended that gives love real value.¹⁶ Agápe is tested by the responses we give to insults and offenses. Cheap love may not be worthless, but it is certainly unproven. Love that loves when it is offended is expensive and strong; it is true agápe.

13. Genesis 3:3 "...God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

14. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death."

15. First Corinthians 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." (Cited above)

16. Luke 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."

When the lover loves his beloved with the unconditional acceptance of agape, he is giving expression to God, Who is within him¹⁷ because “God is agape”¹⁸ and when agape is expressed, God is expressed and agape cannot be expressed without choice. God has given to man the finest of all possible gifts, Himself and the capacity to choose good.

In Conclusion

Through Christ we can refuse to judge. Through Christ we can refuse to condemn. Through Christ we can choose to forgive. The more we make the choice to forgive and not to criticize and condemn, the more Christ discloses Himself to us.¹⁹ And the more He discloses Himself to us the more we choose not to criticize and condemn. It is a spiral going upward and the two lovers revolve around each other like two lights spinning in the night of this world.

Otherwise, it is a spiral going downward:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your

17. John 14:23 “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.’”

18. First John 4:8

19. John 14:21 “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.”

name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”²⁰

Knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent²¹ is a relationship and relationships are everything. Knowing Him comes with sincere obedience and yieldedness to His word.²² God gives us the power to turn from sin and He provides a solution when we don't. That solution is our confession of sin to Him and His forgiveness.²³† He does not require perfection from us. What He requires is sincerity and an upward path toward righteousness.²⁴ What he wants is heart. This results in the living Christ disclosing Himself to us.²⁵

It is this knowing of Him, His presence within us,²⁶ that heals relationships and saves marriages because His presence means the presence of agápe. His presence means the presence

20. Matthew 7:21-23

21. John 17:3 “And this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.”

22. John 14:21 cited above. Also see John 14:23 “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.”

23. First John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and the cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” † The Christian who sins should go immediately to Psalm 51.

24. † This progression toward righteousness is set forth in Second Peter Chapter 1.

25. John 14:21, cited above

26. John 14:23 “Jesus answered and said, If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.”

of agápe because He *is* agápe.²⁷ Agápe heals relationships because agápe is total acceptance and damaged relationships are relationships where total acceptance is lacking.

Relationships are damaged by rejection and they are healed by acceptance. It is only a question of how that acceptance is obtained. The way of the world is to follow original sin to its logical conclusion and structure a work-out based upon on man's knowledge of good and evil—not scripture and not smart.

Scripture is precisely the opposite. Scripture condemns the initiating sin and condemns the condemnation that results from it. They are both sin, both the initiating sin that caused the problem and the judgment and unforgiveness that naturally follow.

The world's way seeks to change the method of relating in order to restore love. The way of scripture is to first eradicate all sin and restore love because love *is* the relationship. The scriptural method skips over the unraveling of the tangled history of rights and wrongs, and then, by divine act creates love, real love, and uses this love to cover over a multitude of sins.²⁸

How does this happen? Relationships are injured by insults and other overt sins. These sins result in judgment and condemnation which are equally, if not more dangerous, sin. Scripture treats both sides because both are sin. Love returns to the Christian when sin leaves.

27. First John 4:8 "...God is [agápe]"

28. First Peter 4:8 "Above all, love one another deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." BEREAN STUDY BIBLE

The sum of it all is that when we are seriously wronged, we cannot, by simple act of our will, forgive and forget. When we are treated unjustly, it is natural to judge the person who has wronged us and to condemn him for it. Emotional scars occur and we cannot ignore them. We need something more than the simple admonition to sweep the injury under the rug and pretend that it did not happen.

We are stuck in a pit with pain that someone else has caused and we stay there until someone gets us out. That someone is Jesus Christ. But He does not do it by vindicating us. He does it by empowering us to forgive and not to take offense.

In order to experience that power, we must yield to Him. By an act of our will, we must forgive and we cease to criticize and take no offense. What we cannot do, He does. He requires effort, which is obedience²⁹ and heart. Through the relationship with Christ, He does the rest.³⁰

So, we are not talking method here. We are talking miracle.

The spiral going upward leads to a dawn of immense freedom that comes on the shoulders of unlimited forgiveness trailing endless love and peace that passes all human comprehension. It is the presence of Jesus Christ Himself.³¹

29. John 14:21,23

30. Second Peter 1:3 “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him.”

Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.³²

Jesus Christ is telling us that we will *know* that we are in Him and He in us. So, this is something that we *experience*. It is neither a method nor a religion. It is an entirely new life. It is eternal life in this life.

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.³³

The experience of eternal life in this life is the absolute apex of all mortal human experience. If both the husband and the wife know Him and live that life they will relate in total harmony and live in endless love.



32. John 14:20

33. John 17:3

Appendix

Sin Kills

FIFTEEN CENTURIES OF WARNING
THAT SIN KILLS

Sin kills in this life and it condemns souls to eternal death in the afterlife. If the soul in this life has been saved, sin will kill what spiritual life it has left on earth. Sin will kill a marriage and kill a family; it will ruin the lives of children who cannot understand and it will kill the faith and peace in the very heart of the believer. It will leave a believer faithless and empty inside wondering how he could ever have believed in the first place. Sin kills. The entire Bible is a warning to us that sin kills. Here are some of the verses:

Genesis 2:17

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.

1400 BC

Psalms 33:18,19

Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death...

967 BC

Ezekiel 18:4

“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die...

593 BC

Ezekiel 33:11

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from you evil ways; for why will ye die?”

593 BC

John 8:51, 52

Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.

30 AD (the words of Jesus Christ)

James 5:20

Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death...

45 AD

Romans 1:32

Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death...

55 AD

Romans 6:16

...sin leading to death...

55 AD

Romans 6:21

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things *is* death.

55 AD

Romans 6:23, 24

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.

55 AD

Second Timothy 1:10

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality

55 AD

Romans 6:16

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

55 AD

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

68 AD

Hebrews 2:9

But we see Jesus...that He, by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

80 AD

Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

90 AD

Revelation 20:14,15 and Revelation 21:8

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire ... [the] unbelieving ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

90 AD