

A romantic walk down a tree-lined path. A man and a woman are walking away from the camera down a wide, paved path. The path is flanked by rows of trees with bare, golden-brown branches that arch over the path, creating a tunnel effect. The ground is covered in fallen leaves, and long shadows are cast across the path. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and intimate.

The Return of Love

By
Charles Chesnutt

“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”

Proverbs 23:23

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Forward

The author is a bankruptcy attorney in Dallas, Texas, where he has resided since 1979. He has been married twice and is the father of four. He holds a ThM degree from Dallas Theological Seminary and an undergraduate degree in Psychology and English Literature. 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 and publishes a website that argues for biblical creationism at CREATIONDESIGN.ORG.



Although we become righteous in Christ by accepting the free gift of salvation, 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.

This book addresses the profound effect of the fall of man on marriages and other relationships and it offers a scriptural avenue for the return of love to the marriage that is challenged.

The remedy presented in this book is generally opposed to all secular and some Christian marital counseling. To the minds of many, the sincere obedience to the two scriptures addressed in this book (Matthew 6:14 and Matthew 7:1) is radical and quite impossible. But the author offers no apology and suggests that the proof of the scriptural truths that are set forth herein is demonstrated by the result that is available to anyone willing to obey them.

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

The pronoun “he” is used in the traditional sense. Depending on the context, “he” includes both male and female, as reflected in Genesis 1:27. The pronoun “she” is reserved only for the female.

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Dallas, Texas 2021
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† indicates a comment on the text of a scripture

◇ Indicates a comment on the accuracy of scripture

⌘ Indicates the beginning or the end of a parenthetical section

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Another website of the author is CREATIONDESIGN.ORG.

The Fall of Man

THEREFORE, JUST AS THROUGH ONE MAN
SIN ENTERED INTO THE WORLD, AND DEATH
THROUGH SIN, AND SO DEATH SPREAD TO
ALL MEN BECAUSE ALL SINNED

ROMANS 5:12

Relationships are everything. And this book is about the second most important relationship: marriage. The most important relationship is not marriage. It is one's relationship with Jesus Christ.

If that statement makes no sense to you, then neither will this little book. However, if you are still interested, please turn first to the appendix called "Knowing God" before you begin reading.

This book is not a self-help manual for alcoholics, adulterers, abusers, liars, husbands who refuse to support their family or those given to anger. Although the book can be very helpful in dealing with overt sin of this nature, it is addressed to the marriage that has lost its love because of arguments, resentments, criticism and conflict. This is a book for the Christian man and woman who are trapped in a marriage that contains the essentials but has lost its love.



When we look beyond the philosophies of man and into the very words of God Himself, we find a truth that starts in one verse in Genesis and stretches all the way to *now*.

This is the verse:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely. But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."¹

This scripture is God's warning to Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil because if they do so they will not only die, but die *on that very day*.

1 . Genesis 2:16,17

Understanding how this scripture affects us today is the secret to an excellent marriage and a contented life. Exactly how and why that works is what this book is about.



Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the fruit although God told them not to. But they did not die when they ate it. In fact, scripture tells us that Adam did not die until 930 years later—almost a millennium.² Therefore, God was either mistaken about what would happen to them on the day that they ate or there is another way to understand Genesis 2:16.

God did not make a mistake when He said that they would die on the day that they ate the fruit. We know this because all scripture is inspired by God Himself³ so it contains no errors. Therefore, if scripture is accurate, why did Adam and Eve not die on the day that they ate the fruit? The answer is they did. But their death was not physical; it was spiritual.^{4†}

It is not unusual for the first mention of death in the Bible to be spiritual death because the Bible is all about spiritual life and spiritual death. For instance, Paul refers to spiritual life and spiritual death when he tells us that “we were dead in our transgressions.”⁵ Peter tells us that “the gospel was preached to those who are [spiritually] dead,”⁶ And Jesus referred to some of the living as “dead,” meaning spiritually dead, when He said “Leave the dead to bury their own dead.”⁷

When Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they were died spiritually just like we do.

2 . Genesis 5:5 “Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.”

3. Second Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

4. † Some theologians teach that the only “death” in Genesis 2:16 was physical death rather than spiritual death, even though Adam lived for 930 years after he ate the fruit. Not only is this an error, but it misses the point of Genesis 2 and 3, which are all about the effect that the fruit had on Adam and Eve. See the Appendix “Adam’s Sin,” in the digital edition of this book for a discussion of this error.

5 . Ephesians 2:5

6 . First Peter 4:6

7 . Matthew 8:22

And you, being dead in your sins ... hath He quickened [made alive] together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses^{8†}

Jesus came to give spiritual life back to us.⁹ So, when Jesus says He gives us eternal life, He is not saying that our physical bodies will have eternal life.¹⁰ He is saying that He gives our souls eternal life:

Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.^{11†}

And the eternal life that He gives us is given now, in this life, to be lived and to be experienced. To experience His life in this life is to know God.

And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent.¹²

So Adam and Eve died spiritually because they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But how can the knowledge of good and evil be bad and how can the acquisition of it cause spiritual death?



8 . Colossians 2:13 KJV † We know that this verse refers to spiritual death rather than physical death because it refers to people who are dead in sin, not dead physically. Being dead in trespasses and sin is what spiritual death is. It is from this spiritual death that Christ saves us (John 3:16). Christ does not save our bodies from physical death (the first death) because all bodies must die (Hebrews 9:27); Christ saves us from spiritual death, which can occur in this life as the result of sin or permanently in the second death (Revelation 21:8).

9 . Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death” Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul that sins shall die” See the Appendix entitled “Sin Kills.”

10 . Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed to man to die once.”

11 . John 11:26 † There are two deaths and two resurrections. The first death is the death of the body and the second death (includes) the death of the soul. But those who trust in Christ will die only the first death (the death of the body). Later their original body will be resurrected and joined with their (now immortal) soul (Revelation 20:6).

12 . John 17:3

The Fruit of the Tree

FOR IN THE DAY THAT YOU EAT FROM IT YOU
SHALL SURELY DIE

GENESIS 2:17

The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not bad. It was good. We know this because the knowledge of good and evil is an attribute of God¹ and therefore cannot be bad. The problem does not lie in the knowledge of good and evil. The problem is what man does with it.

When man acquires the knowledge of good and evil, he becomes aware of his own sin, and with that same knowledge he justifies himself and casts the blame to others. That is exactly what Adam and Eve did immediately after they ate the fruit.

Doubtless, Adam and Eve did not fully understand the profound change that occurred in them when they acquired the knowledge of good and evil. But they utilized that knowledge immediately. The first thing they did was to cover their bodies.² The second thing they did was to cover their guilt:

Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

And he said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.

And He said, "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"

And the man said "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

1. Genesis 3:22 "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.'"

2. 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 loin coverings."

And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”³

What is happening here? Adam is justifying himself by shifting the blame to Eve and to God, and Eve is shifting the blame to the serpent.

“It was that woman!” Said Adam. “That woman that You gave me; she gave me the fruit!” Adam creates a scenario where God was jointly responsible for Adam’s sin. Adam makes this argument even though he was fully aware of what happened between Eve and the serpent because he was right beside Eve when the serpent tempted her.⁴ Adam is utilizing the knowledge of good and evil to justify himself rather than admitting that he sinned.

Eve does the same thing. She does not admit to giving the fruit to Adam and she shifts her blame to the serpent, “*It was the serpent* who deceived me”.^{5†}

Not much has changed since the garden. We inherited the knowledge of good and evil from Adam and Eve because the knowledge of good and evil is spiritual, not physical. We utilize it to justify ourselves and deflect the blame to someone else. We stretch and bend, excuse and explain and mold and reshape our knowledge of good and evil. We chew on fruit until it’s taste is appropriate and then we assign innocence to ourselves and guilt to others. When this is done

3 . Genesis 3:11-13

4. Genesis 3:6 “She gave also to her husband with her”

5 . † It was the woman whom Satan approached, not the man because deception was the weakness of the woman. Eve tells us this herself in Genesis 2:13, “The serpent deceived me.” Satan first challenged God’s word by asking the woman, “Has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?” But memory and reason are not the weaknesses of the woman. She is not deceived by Satan’s misquotation. So, Satan switches tactics and raises a question about God’s motive. He attacks God’s motive because he knows that the first thing that the woman looks to when she looks for truth is motive. Satan argues that God’s motive is selfish, so His command should be ignored. He says that God knows “in the day you eat [the fruit] your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (v.5). Satan is telling her that God’s motive is to keep her ill informed and in the dark. Eve saw that God’s command did exactly that; it prevented her from knowing good and evil. She could not understand why she should be denied this knowledge. She therefore substituted her own wisdom for God’s and ate the fruit. The fall of Adam was far simpler. Adam’s weakness was not deception. Adam’s weakness was the woman (Gen. 3:17). Her influence over him was greater than God’s command, so he takes the fruit from her and eats it without hesitation.

repeatedly in a marriage the result is destruction—destruction because when we are finished exculpating ourselves we believe it and because we believe it, we become adamant, unchangeable.

Self-justification it is not just an argument that we make to defend a sin we have committed. Self-justification becomes mixed with reality; it becomes something that we rely upon as reality. It becomes our self-image. It becomes us.

The more we self-justify, the larger and more fragile our self-image becomes. It inflates like a balloon and like a balloon, it becomes more and more fragile the larger it grows. The more we inflate our self-image, the more disconnected we become from reality.

The larger our self-image becomes, the more fearsome would be its demise and the more vigorously we must defend it. This is the defensive person.

It is this same self-justification that convinces opposing spouses that they are each correct when there is a disagreement. So when there is a disagreement, they are defending not only their rights, but they are also defending “truth” and their own perception of themselves. Disputes of this nature may subside but they do not end.

The more adamant the parties become, the more impossible it is to adjust. And adjustment, sincere adjustment, is essential to an excellent marriage. We all know that. The problem is perceiving the need of our own adjustment.

So, God places a fruit bearing tree in the middle of the garden and tells Adam and Eve they can eat any fruit in the garden except the fruit from that tree. Indeed, what better way to ensure that two innocent, newly created beings would taste an attractive fruit than by telling them that they could have any fruit except that one, and then leaving them alone with it—and giving them Satan as a companion! Why did God do that? Was He not aware that these things would happen?



Why the Garden?

THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH
LIGHT; IT GIVETH UNDERSTANDING UNTO
THE SIMPLE.

PSALM 119:130

God knew exactly what He was doing when he created the garden and all that was in it. God is not arbitrary. He created the garden and He created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and placed it in the middle of the garden where it could not be missed. He created Adam and Eve and Satan and placed them all together in the garden for a reason. He knew that Satan would deceive Eve and that Adam would be swayed by his wife and that they would both eat the fruit. *Of course* God knew what would happen. He is God. He knew exactly what He was doing and He knew exactly what would happen. And not only did He know it, but He planned it.

To understand why God did what He did, let us first consider who God is. There are many scriptures that tell us about God's characteristics but only one that tells us who He *is*.

Various scriptures tell us that God is omniscient,¹ omnipotent,² and omniscient.³ They tell us that God is good⁴ and that He created the world and all life.⁵ And there are other scriptures that tell us what God does, what He can do, what He did do and what He will do. But there is only one scripture that tells us what God *is*. That scripture is First John 4:8 and that scripture tells us that God is love.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is
from God; and every one who loves is born of
God and knows God. The one who does not
love does not know God, for God is love.^{6†}

1. Hebrews 4:13 "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

2. Revelation 19:6 "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." KJV

3. First John 3:20 "that if our heart condemns us, that God is greater than our heart, and He knows all things."

4. Luke 18:19 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone."

5. Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

6. First John 4:7,8 † All of theology should begin right here.

In order to express love, God must have someone to love, someone to relate to and someone to relate to Him. We learn from other scriptures that God is a Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) but at the same time these three persons are just One God because God is One.^{7†}

Since God is one, He cannot be two and He cannot be the object of His own affection. Nor can He create another of Himself because there is only *one* God. But He can create man as an independent being who is capable of love. And that is exactly what He did.

He created man in His *image*,⁸ but without His attributes. For instance, man is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. And although man has the capacity to love, man himself is not love.

God made man to be capable of love and capable of good (righteousness). But love and righteousness require a free choice. Indeed, the primary element of love is the free choice to love and to be loved. One must be free to love or not to love if one is going to love at all. Hence the immense value of man. Man alone can make a free choice to love God.^{9†}

We see the entire scenario of life encapsulated in the garden. Man and woman, both independent, imperfect beings and both created with a free will. They are placed in a world where Satan dwells and temptation abounds. What will they do?

We can be righteous only because we can choose not to be unrighteous. Without that choice, righteousness is irrelevant. One may pay money to feed the poor and at the same time pay taxes that are also used to feed the poor. Money is paid in both instances and used for the same purpose but only one of the payments is a free choice. Only one of them is an act of righteousness. The other is compelled.

7 . Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, and the Lord is One.”
† Both the Old Testament and the New Testament make it clear, however, that although God is one, there are three persons in the Godhead. They are the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit.

8 . Genesis 1:26 “Let Us make man in Our image...” ◇ The reference to God as “Our” and “Us” when God is One (Deuteronomy 6:4) is necessary because God consists of One God and three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

9. † There are theological differences of opinion as to whether man’s free will is actually free. Suffice it to say that, for the purposes of this book and from man’s perspective, his choices are free.

In order to choose to be righteous, man must first know what righteousness is. In order to do good, we must first know what good is. In order to know what good is, man must also know what it is not. This is why the forbidden fruit was fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man must have the knowledge of good and evil before a choice to do good or to do evil is relevant.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of laws are based upon man's inherent knowledge of good and evil—and upon the premise that everybody has a knowledge of good and evil. If that were not so, then no one could ever know what is legal or illegal without reading law books and remembering what they all say. Man knows instinctively what is good and what is evil and he is held accountable for it even if he cannot read a single word.

But choice cannot be truly free if God, like a omniscient policeman, stands guard over everything that we say or do. So, God creates a world where His existence may be ignored, a world where the consequences of unrighteousness may be of immediate benefit, a world where rewards may be acquired by means of lies and deception, a world where man can deny that there is a spiritual aspect of anything, a world where atheism can find a foothold. It is only in *that* world that righteousness can be a *real choice*. And it is only in a world where righteousness is a real choice that righteousness can exist. If one is to be righteous, one must also have the choice (and the viable possibility) of being unrighteous. Here lies one of the great and eternal reasons for the creation of man: righteousness. God creates eternal value (righteousness) by creating man and giving him the power to choose good—or evil.

And here lies another eternal reason for the creation of man. Man is an independent agent who can truly love.

By creating this world, God permits the good and the evil to grow together and flourish according to the choices made by man. But at the end of the day, the good and the evil will be separated. The good will be harvested like a crop of wheat and the evil burned will be up exactly as Jesus says in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In that parable, a man had sown good seed but an enemy came at night and sowed weeds (tares) in the same field. The farmer lets the both grow together. When the time comes, he harvests them all and keeps the wheat and burns the tares.¹⁰ Jesus explains the parable:

The One who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed represents the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are collected and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom every cause of sin and all who practice lawlessness. And they will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.....¹¹

But God has a problem. God is all powerful, but limited by His own nature. For instance, God cannot lie because He is Truth.¹² God cannot die because God is life.¹³ God cannot be malicious because God is love.¹⁴ God cannot be unrighteous or unjust because He is righteous and He is just.¹⁵

Herein is God's problem: God is love but He is also just. His righteousness and His justice demand that sin be punished and the inevitable consequence of sin is death¹⁶ and we have all sinned¹⁷ because we were created as imperfect beings with free will. But this means that God must impose the death penalty on us, the apple of His eye, the very ones that He created and loves.¹⁸

10. Matthew 13:24-30

11. Matthew 13:39-42

12. John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."

13. Id.

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

15. Deuteronomy 32:3 "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."

16. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death." See also Revelation 20:8 "the second death."

17. Romans 3:23 "All have sinned..."

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

There is only one way for Him to remain true to both His Justice and His Love. He must bear the punishment for our sins Himself. We cannot pay for our own sins because the punishment is eternal death.¹⁹ God must bear the death-penalty for our sins Himself. This is Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the death penalty for us. Jesus was resurrected, however, because His death paid for the very sins for which He died. Thus, the cross became the ultimate expression of total love.

But how could *Christ's* death pay for *our* sin? Because God placed us spiritually "in Christ" so that Christ's death would be our death and Christ's resurrection would be our resurrection:

We have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection²⁰

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.²¹

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes [trusts] in Him should not perish but have eternal life.²²

There is no more potent environment for love and sacrifice, ecstasy and pain, righteousness and temptation, self justification and humility to all come together, for good or ill, than in a marriage.



19. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death." See also Revelation 20:8 "the second death."

20. Romans 6:5

21. Second Corinthians 5:17

22. John 3:16

The Effect on a Marriage

LOVE MAKES IT WORK

In the immortal *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson tells us of the inimitable one-legged Long John Silver. One can almost hear the wind in the sails and Silver's wooden crutch thumping about the deck of a pirate ship somewhere in the Caribbean. His left leg was cut off close to the hip and he walked with a wooden crutch under his left shoulder, "which he managed with wonderful dexterity, hopping about upon it like a bird."¹ Silver's crutch is an essential part of who he is.

And so it is with us, except our crutch is not physical; our crutch is mental. Our crutch is how we justify the things that we say and do. Because this is our natural response, *we cannot fully perceive how it affects our spouse*. We see only that what we do is *justified*.

When we dispute, we dispute with justification. When we defend, we defend with justification. And when we accuse, we accuse with justification. And when there is no outward conflict, the inward resentment and bitterness continue unhindered and fully justified. As long as we can justify what we do, we are ok with almost any consequence, including divorce.

But of course, the trouble is that *anything* can be justified. In the 19th Century, enslavement was justified and made legal. In the 20th Century, genocide was justified and enforced by the German state. And now the murder of unborn children is justified and legalized all over the world. Divorce becomes justified; adultery becomes justified; abuse becomes justified. And bitterness and unforgiveness are always justified—and they are always sin.

But conflict was not always the case with lovers. When love first began, there was no history of past offenses, only love. Back then, when love was blind, we overlooked the mistakes and failures of our lover. It was rarely necessary to mention them because offense was rarely taken. Offense was rarely taken because offenses were overshadowed by love. But as time passed, errors and slights accumulated, the ground was fallowed and each wrong carried the weight of its accumulated past. The vine of bitterness entwined.

1. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*.

After a while the honeymoon ended and the love that was to last a lifetime began to subside. The lovers did not fully understand what was happening but they were certain that it was not their fault because they were justified; it was the *other* spouse who had been offensive. “Everything that *I* did was justified,” said each spouse privately. And they could not understand why the other spouse could not perceive their own faults, faults that were so clearly obvious to the other spouse.

The lovers decide to work out their problems. They will sort out the pieces and reconstruct their relationship. They will take the good parts and emphasize them and build on them. And when someone forgets to do or say something, the other will remember that the good points outweigh the bad. They believe that if they can keep remembering the good points and ignoring the bad, the good points will outweigh the bad and balance out the relationship. This will provide the structure for reconciliation and love will return.

Unfortunately this method remains based upon judgment and self-justification; more generous judgment and self-justification perhaps, but still judgment and self-justification. It works for a while, but it ultimately fails because no matter how generous one spouse is, the method remains based upon each party appraising the other and determining whether the good points actually do continue to outweigh the bad. Once this method is established as a foundation for a marriage, the end result will probably be further separation because when the cares and responsibilities of life and family are encountered, the other spouse, who was not perfect to begin with, will show weakness and sin. The stability of the family cannot successfully rest upon the good-points/bad-points evaluations by each spouse.

Another way people work out problems is to put everything back on the table and sort out what happened. After all, if they can understand why someone said something or did something, they can clarify what happened. And when they see what happened, they can find a realistic solution. They can find out who is responsible for what and make apologies and reconcile.

This is a most reasonable method, but the problem is that “discussing” offenses and listening to justifications is what the problem *is*. This method is little more than a continuation of the disagreements between two parties who have already justified their respective positions and are doing little more than defending themselves in a much

nicer way. One cannot cure the relationship by continuing to discuss until everybody gets happy—because nobody is ever going to get happy.

Another way people solve their problems is to establish a set of rules to govern productive discussion. For instance, each party has the right to state his case without interruption; each party can defend without interruption. There will be no cursing, no name calling, foot-stomping, table banging or sarcasm. This method establishes the rules of engagement for fighting fair. But fighting fair is not the goal. The goal is to eliminate fighting altogether. Love does not thrive in the midst of fighting even if it is fair.

All of these methods (and others as well) are nothing more than different ways to shuffle the issues.

It is as if all the issues and all the arguments and all the rights and all the wrongs were written on little pieces of paper and placed in a large glass jar. The parties take turns reaching into the jar and rearranging the contents to their advantage or perhaps even rearranging them to be as fair and as just as possible. But no matter how fair and accurate the parties are, they still have a jar full of problems.

None of these methods address the root problem. The root problem is sin, sin that began in the garden. The parties are taking their knowledge of good and evil and using it to justify themselves and, when necessary, they are shifting the blame.

Scripture points to a *radically* different cure. Scripture tells us to break the jar, skip all of the methods and burn the paper. Forget justice, abandon all retribution, forgive everything, cease all condemnation, all criticism, all anger and all demand for rights.

Of course, this is contrary to all reason and human understanding and it results in gut-wrenching dissatisfaction, buried resentments, unspoken complaints, unresolved injuries and, for many, a burning sense of being used or taken advantage of.

The miracle occurs after we have yielded to God's word and turned from all retribution, unforgiveness, condemnation, criticism, anger, demand for rights and all other related sin. If both Husband and Wife obey Him in this way nothing else matters. It is a new world.

But miracles are not very plentiful these days, so as soon as someone mentions a miracle the skepticism meter starts moving. From a purely practical perspective, let me say that one of the really convenient things about miracles is that they either happen or they don't. And you don't necessarily have to believe in them before you see them, especially this one. This one is a "cash on delivery" type miracle. You pay; you receive. But if you are really sincere about it, God will trick you. He will tell you that you can quit at any time if you want to. But you will never want to. You will spend the rest of your life getting all of this miracle that you can.

So what is this miracle?



The Miracle

WHAT IS THE MIRACLE?

The miracle is love—love that is real, love that is actual, true and experiential, love that is passionate and physical, love that fulfills and completes, love that cannot be faked—crazy and impossible love, love that is the stuff that dreams are made of. The miracle is the love that God gives. Love is the miracle.

The great error of the worldly methods is the belief that the spouses have to heal the relationship *before* love will return. This is backwards. Healed relationships don't create love. Love creates healed relationships. Love is not the goal; love is the cure.

Of course, love may well have long since departed or at least seriously diminished. And surely, there are dark histories of sad and destructive encounters, conflicts and sin that were never fully resolved, injuries that never healed and words that can never be recalled. So, we may be talking about a totally dead love.

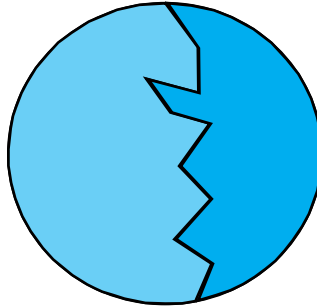
But then again, we are talking miracle here, not method. Method does not work miracles and neither do we. God works miracles.

Do you remember when love was new? We never really had control over it. Remember? Love has always been outside of ourselves. We couldn't create it when we wanted it and we couldn't fake it when we were supposed to and we couldn't get rid of it when we didn't want it. It has *always* been outside of ourselves. So if we never could create it in the first place, why in the world would we think that we could re-create it now? Give it up. You can't.

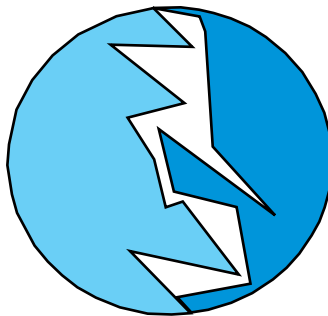
Ideally, at the dawn of a new love the lovers fit like a hand in an old glove. Their love carried them into a rare world where disagreements were overshadowed by the magnificent chemistry of eros (romantic love), the silent physical/spiritual fire between a man and a woman. "Male and female created He them."¹

1. Genesis 1:27

When love happened, it was as if the irregular shape of our own particular and individual self has finally found its match. The parts of who we were that previously could not find their match discovered a completion in the other person.

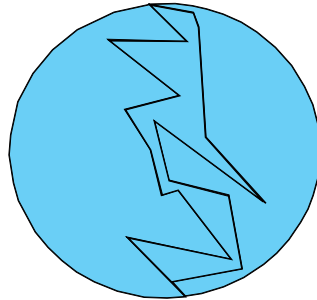


But over time we changed and the offenses of each spouse eroded the fit. On the outside there was still be a circle, but inside the circle the relationship was fractured.

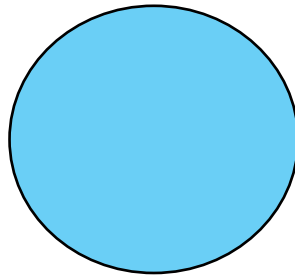


So what did we do? We lived with the fracture and hoped that the pieces would reshape themselves and come together again. Sometimes pieces do reshape themselves, but most often the fracture remains.

But when love returns it overshadows the fracture. The differences remain but they are overshadowed by love. The memories remain for a time, but the fracture itself is gone.



Over time, the bad memories fade and good ones take their place.



This is how love heals a broken marriage. The big question is how to get it. To understand how to get it, we must first understand why it left in the first place or why it never really came.



Relational Sin

LOVE LEAVES WHEN SIN ARRIVES

Love departs when sin arrives. More specifically, love leaves when confronted with relational sin. Relational sin is sin against relationships. Love is a relationship and love leaves when relational sin occurs because sin, all sin kills.¹ Relational sin kills love.

There are obvious relational sins like adultery, slander, flirting, lying and insults. All of these have a serious impact on love and have to cease entirely before love will return.

In this book, however, we focus on two subtle but dangerous relational sins, the sins of judgment and unforgiveness.

The sin of judgment is the primal sin, the sin that arose in the garden when Adam and Eve utilized their new-found knowledge of good and evil and justified their sin and shifted the blame. Unforgiveness is a state of continuing judgment and condemnation. Unforgiveness is sin and sin kills. Unforgiveness kills the spiritual life of the person who harbors it.

Here is what the Bible says about judgment and unforgiveness:

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.²

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.³



1. See Appendix *Sin Kills*

2. Matthew 7:1,2

3. Matthew 6:14,15

In order to see these sins in real life, let us consider the following dialog between an imaginary spouse and scripture.

WORDS THAT ARE SIN

SPOUSE: I know you think that my harsh words are sin, and I know that I have said some harsh words. But every word that I have ever said was true.

SCRIPTURE: Perhaps so, but when scripture defines the sins of the tongue, it does not differentiate between words that are true and words that are false.⁴ It differentiates between words that are sin and words that are not sin.⁵ So, just because a word is true does not mean it is not relational sin.⁶

SPOUSE: So, you are saying that I can't speak true words to my spouse?

SCRIPTURE: No. I am saying that you cannot speak sinful words to your spouse.

SPOUSE: Ok. So define sinful words?

SCRIPTURE: Sinful words are judgmental words and judgmental words are critical words. The biblical word for "judge" is "krino" and it means to judge or criticize. Anger is a form of judgment because one cannot be angry without judging.

4. Proverbs 17:27 "A man of knowledge restrains his words, and a man of understanding maintains a calm spirit." Leviticus 19:16 "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord."

5. Matthew 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." Proverbs 15:2 "The tongue of the wise commends knowledge" Proverbs 11:13 "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered." Proverbs 10:20 "The tongue of the righteous is choice silver" Psalm 52:4 "You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue."

6. James 1:26 "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear"

Judgmental words can be insults or simple blaming such as “You are rude” or “Don’t you ever think of anyone but yourself?” or “That’s a lie!” or “You are responsible for every bit of this” or “I wish you could learn to ____.”

SPOUSE: But what if those things are true? You are telling me I can’t tell my spouse about an insult, which is itself a sin?

SCRIPTURE: No. You may tell your spouse about an insult, but you must do so without sin yourself. Just phrase your statement to be without sin. For instance, instead of saying “You are rude!” you can say, “Can you phrase that differently? Because the way you say that makes me feel insulted.”

When your spouse is selfish, it is not necessary to say “Don’t you ever think of anyone but yourself?” You can just as easily say, “Have you considered how that will affect me?”

When your spouse says something to you that is not true, instead of saying “You are a liar!” why not say “Are you sure that’s right? I believe you are mistaken.”

All of these statements place the dispute on the table without anger and confrontation, and without committing sin yourself. But will they resolve the dispute? Probably not, but they certainly set the tone for a productive discussion rather than propagating an argument. They avoid arguments because *they limit relational sin to only one of the parties to the dispute.*

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.⁷

SPOUSE: So you are saying that the root problem is sin.

SCRIPTURE: Exactly. The root problem is sin. Sin kills love.

SPOUSE: Sometimes what my spouse says to me makes me so angry I just can’t be nice. I just can’t not respond in kind.

7. Proverbs 15:1

SCRIPTURE: Anger is dangerous. It removes restraints and injures indiscriminately. It rips the fabric of love and tears at the flesh beneath it. It cannot be effectively suppressed. The only way to deal with anger is to defuse it with obedience to scripture. Anger is defused when you cease to judge because when you cease to judge, you cease to be angry.

Anger is a characteristic of spiritual weakness.

The vexation of a fool is known at once⁸

Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who does not control his temper.⁹

A man of quick temper acts foolishly¹⁰

The angry person is to be avoided.

Make no friendship with a man given to anger¹¹

On the other hand, adherence to Matthew 7:1 is spiritual strength. It gives peace of mind to both you and your spouse because each time you refuse to criticize or judge your spouse, you avoid a conflict and you demonstrate that you can be trusted not to injure or insult even when attacked. Obedience to Matthew 7:1 is the primary key to restoring love and saving a family.

SPOUSE: I hear that loud and clear. My spouse speaks critical words or slights me and that kills my love.

SCRIPTURE: Why? Why do they kill your love?

SPOUSE: Because they are offensive.

SCRIPTURE: And you take offense?

SPOUSE: Of course.

8. Proverbs 12:16

9. Proverbs 25:28

10. Proverbs 14:17

11. Proverbs 22:24

SCRIPTURE: You take offense because you understand that your spouse did whatever it was because he or she was thoughtless or uncaring? You take offense because you judge.

SPOUSE: How is this judgment of another? All I did was take offense.

SCRIPTURE: One cannot take offense without judging another.

SPOUSE: Look. All I know is that the critical words of my spouse kill my love.

SCRIPTURE: Probably not. The sinful words of your spouse may hurt and disrupt your relationship but that hurt heals when equanimity and acceptance return. It is the love of the speaker that is killed by the speaker's sin because sin kills the spiritual life of the person who commits the sin, not the spiritual life of the person who has been injured by the sin.¹²

The loss of love occurs in the heart of the spouse who commits relational sin and it is perpetuated when that spouse justifies the sin. Justification of sin makes the sinner believe that he or she is justified, so there is no need for either apology or confession.

Unconfessed sin remains as long as it is justified in the mind of the one who commits it. On the other hand, obedience (righteousness) is required if God is to make Himself known to the Christian.¹³ And knowing God is the source of love.¹⁴† Self justification keeps you away from God and your spouse. Only the sin of the sinner can prevent him from knowing God. The sins of others can hurt, but they cannot kill. That is the nature of righteousness and sin.

12. Romans 6:23 “the wages of sin is death” Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul that sins shall die”

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

14. First John 4:7 “Let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. † This passage does not say that everyone who is born of God loves because some who are born of God may not love. It says that the person who is both born of God and knows God will love (v.7) and he who does not love does not know God because God is love (v.8). Thus love, real love, rests in knowing God, not simply being a child of God. Love is the key to life and knowing God is the key to love. See Appendix, Knowing God.

SPOUSE: Ok. So, why do I leave each argument wondering if I will ever care for my spouse any more?

SCRIPTURE: Let me ask you this. When you hear the critical, condemnatory words of your spouse, do you reject or criticize your spouse privately? Most people do. Most people mentally reject their spouse when criticized because rejection serves to insulate them from further injury. However, rejection is the opposite of love,^{15†} so when you reject your spouse you diminish your own love as well.

Rejection is relational sin because God has commanded mankind to love even when criticized.¹⁶ We are called to love the unlovable and sometimes that is a spouse.¹⁷ It is therefore imperative that you refuse to reject your spouse even when you want to. You must accept again and forgive as soon as possible after an injury.

SPOUSE: It is so very difficult to deal with my spouse who attacks me, disparages me and finds offense in things that I never intended to be offensive.

SCRIPTURE: Indeed. Repeated critical attacks are very damaging, especially when they are unexpected. Unexpected condemnation is Satan's most effective tool because they weaken the resolve of the injured spouse and kill the spiritual life (and therefore the love) of the critical, unforgiving spouse.¹⁸ This moves the other spouse to conclude that he or she is no longer loved and disempowers that spouse to return love. When no love is returned it solidifies the conviction that there is no love. It is a vicious cycle. This is the Cycle of Judgment and Offense.¹⁹

15. See First Corinthians 13:7 Love "bears all things, believes all things hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails"

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. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people."

17. First John 4:7 "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God"

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

19. See Appendix *Cycle of Judgment and Offense*

If it is the husband who has been disempowered to return love, this is an especially serious matter because the wife's primary relational need is love.

It is for this reason that scripture repeatedly commands husbands to love their wives.²⁰ And it is for this reason that Satan often orchestrates this attack through the wife.²¹

You must reassert acceptance as soon as possible after your spouse has injured you.

ANGER

SCRIPTURE: No matter what the problem may be, your goal is to create an open dialog with your spouse without condemnation, criticism or unforgiveness, an environment of total and unconditional acceptance.²² Your spouse must be made to feel comfortable in sharing any problems and misgivings or discussing anything. This must be a safe place where there is no anger²³ and no condemnation.²⁴ That means never responding to anger with anger.

SPOUSE: But why is there so much anger in some marriages? And for the slightest reason! It seems that there must be a reason that is not evident.

SCRIPTURE: Indeed. There is always a cause for anger. One of the most prevalent causes for anger is balancing.

SPOUSE: Excuse me ... Balancing? Balancing what?

20. Colossians 3:19 "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" Ephesians 5:33 "let each one of you love his wife as himself" Ephesians 5:28 "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies"

21. First Peter 3:7 "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." NKJV

22. Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Matthew 7:1 "Judge not"

23. Psalm 37:8 "Refrain from anger and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil."

24. Romans 8:1 "Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

SCRIPTURE: Guilt and blame. People use blame, which is judgment, to balance the guilt that their self-justification cannot erase.

Guilt is manageable with self-justification but only up to a point. For instance, the guilt caused by the sin of gossip can be relieved by telling yourself that the person that you are slandering deserves it and what you are saying is true. But if your sin adultery, it may be difficult to tell yourself that your spouse deserved it. In such a case, condemnation is the alternative. The guilty spouse often blames and judges others in order to relieve the sting of his own guilt. As long as the guilty spouse can condemn the other spouse for something, the guilt can be blunted. This condemnation is often expressed in anger. It is as if the angry spouse needs to have the other spouse guilty of something.

And the anger may be generalized. That is, it does not necessarily have to be directed against the spouse. The spouse who is constantly angry for minimal reasons is often someone who is burdened with guilt.

Of course, guilt is not the only reason for anger. Anger may arise from other things such as overwork, financial pressure, injustice or simply from a dysfunctional marriage. But in those instances, the biblical spouse can be and should be the haven against the storm against such things, so that the guilty spouse can cleanse himself with confession and forgiveness.²⁵

SPOUSE: Well, I'm not sure that I buy that. After all, not everybody believes in God and not everybody believes that adultery is wrong. So why should an adulterous spouse feel guilty when he or she does not believe that adultery is a sin?

SPIRITUAL LIFE AND SPIRITUAL DEATH

SCRIPTURE: Some people believe that we live in an amoral, Godless world, but we do not. Some people believe that the only real part of them is a physical body, but they are mistaken. They have a spirit and they have a soul. And when they commit sin, they die spiritually

25. James 5:16 "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." NKJV

in this life²⁶ and they die eternally in the next.²⁷ Spiritual death in scripture is not the same black or white, alive or dead thing as it is with physical death. Spiritual death occurs in degrees and it can be reversed in this life. If never reversed it results in a final judgment of eternal death.²⁸

When a soul is dead or dying, the person feels it because spiritual life and spiritual death are palpable. Indeed, the test to determine whether one is redeemed or not is to look inside himself and see if Christ is there.²⁹ The redeemed person *experiences* the presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁰ The unredeemed person does not; he experiences internal death,³¹ which often presents itself as an internal void or emptiness.

It is for this reason that salvation is like being born a second time and discovering the reality of spiritual things.³² And it is because of the incomparable experience of knowing Christ in comparison to a life without Him³³ that Christians dedicate their lives to telling people about Christ, even though it can be embarrassing. It is why the Bible is the Number One best seller every year. People buy bibles by the thousands just to give them away because they have discovered what happens when people read them.

Therefore, one cannot escape guilt by pretending that it is not there. But you are right that some people are so far enmeshed in sin and spiritual death that they can hardly perceive guilt. But for most, guilt is the knife that kills the spirit. People will go to great lengths to

26. Colossians 2:13 “And you, being dead in your sins” Romans 6:12 “The wages of sin is death” See Appendix *Sin Kills*

27. Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul who sins will die”

28. Revelation 21:8 “...their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

29. Second Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Can’t you see for yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you actually fail the test?”

30. Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

31. Ephesians 2:1 “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins”

32. John 3:3 “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

33. Philippians 3:8 “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” KJV

remove the knife without admitting their sin. But Jesus Christ is the only real cure. Jesus Christ is the only way to obtain true forgiveness for sin.³⁴

Jesus Christ is the only way to remove the guilt³⁵ and Jesus Christ is the only way to know God.³⁶ When Jesus Christ breaks through to you there is simply no mistaking Him.

SCRIPTURE WORKS

SCRIPTURE: There is a simple rule that covers practically all of what we have discussed. It says “Treat others in the same way that you would want them to treat you.”³⁷ It works for difficult confrontations as well as easy ones. Think about it. If you are about to say something that will hurt someone’s feelings just don’t say it. The rule applies whether you are in the right or in the wrong. If you are in the wrong, you want people to be honest with you and tell you what they really think, but you don’t want them to insult you when they do.

SPOUSE: I like that little rule. It’s simple and I can see that it could make a big difference. Who came up with it?

SCRIPTURE: I believe it was Jesus Christ who came up with that one.

SPOUSE: So is Jesus where you got all of this?

SCRIPTURE: God inspired all of my words.³⁸

SPOUSE: Well I like what you say, and I will give it a try.

SCRIPTURE: Scripture cleanses you and changes you and shows you life as you have never known it before. It enables you to love and be loved. It makes you much happier, brings you peace and certainty.

34. First John 1:9 “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

35. Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

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

37. Matthew 7:12 “treat people the same way you want them to treat you”

38. Second Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is inspired by God”

It is not just any book. It is God's book and in a spiritual sense God is in His word. You inhale righteousness and goodness when you read His word.³⁹

SPOUSE: What if I try it and it does not work?

SCRIPTURE: It will work. But to answer your question, if you try it and it does not work, then you have lost nothing.

SPOUSE: So all I have to do is believe in Jesus, right?

SCRIPTURE: Trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin is the prerequisite to salvation. But the bottom line for knowing God or saving a marriage demands much more than that. You have to actually *do* something.⁴⁰ And that something is to obey scripture. As you obey, Christ discloses Himself to you⁴¹ and comes to live spiritually inside of you⁴² and brings the miracle of love into your marriage because He is love.⁴³ True Christianity is knowing God.⁴⁴ It is His presence that provides both the motivation and the strength to do good and to be good. The bottom line is that when you obey, He does the rest. And it just works.

OVERCOMING SIN

SPOUSE: Suppose I read in scripture where He is clearly telling me not to do something and I don't want to stop doing it?

SCRIPTURE: Ha! You have touched on the very core of Christian life. Think of a particular sin that tempts you. The only way to really be free of it is to grow in Christ to the point where it is no longer desirable.

39. John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God"

40. James 2:20 "faith without works is useless"

41. 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."

42. 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."

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

44. John 17:3 "This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

All sin originates in a human desire, of course. And God does not alter that desire (He created it). What He does is to clarify what that desire really is and then provide the satisfaction of that desire through His own presence or through things in the world or both.

It is when you become enmeshed in a sin that things become really difficult because the more the sin is practiced, the more difficult it becomes to see what the original human desire really is. Until you can see the desire from which the sin arose and see how that desire can be truly and fully satisfied in Christ, you may well remain trapped in sin.

For instance, take the misuse of alcohol. People drink too much alcohol because it relieves stress and dulls the cares of life. It is a substitute for the peace of God. The same is true for drugs. Drugs are an escape from reality. But Christ gives you a reality that you don't want to escape from. People engage in illicit sex ostensibly because it is physically pleasurable, but most people do it because they are looking for something else even if it is temporary. Illicit sex is a substitute for the physical/spiritual completion that only a marriage in Christ can provide. The more these sins are practiced, the more ingrained they become.

SPOUSE: Suppose I am doing something that I can't stop doing?

SCRIPTURE: You can. No temptation will overtake you that is not common to man. Everybody is tempted. You are *supposed* to be tempted, but God will not let you be tempted beyond your ability to withstand it. And He will always provide you a way to escape.⁴⁵ He provides practical advice: *flee* the sin.⁴⁶ Don't give it a foothold. But understand that not everything that some people call sin is actual sin. You must look at scripture and be guided by scripture.

SPOUSE: Ok. I have a question about that. Suppose, just suppose now, that I have this very strong thing for somebody other than my spouse and I see this person regularly. If love is largely outside of our control, how am I going to deal with what I feel?

45. First Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

46. First Timothy 6:11 "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness."

SCRIPTURE: Inordinate romantic affection is human love, not God's love. It is what kept humanity alive ever since the garden. It can be immensely powerful and it can turn your actions into sin if you let it. What you feel is not wrong; it is natural. The feeling itself is not sin. It is how you are made. It is sin only when you do the wrong thing with what you feel. The best way to deal with inordinate affection it is to transform inappropriate affection into appropriate affection. There is kind of a trick to it. It is always God's will that you love with God's love. So, what you do is to pray sincerely that God will give you *His* love for that person. God will honor that prayer because God always answers prayers that accord with His will.⁴⁷

SPOUSE: Really? That works?

SCRIPTURE: That works. But you have to cooperate when you feel Him change you. Also, if a married man looks upon a woman who is not his wife with lustful intent, this is adultery in his heart.⁴⁸ The reason why this practice is dangerous is obvious. Just don't be that person. Flee from that sin.

SPOUSE: Ok. Now the big question. Can you (scripture) change my spouse?

SCRIPTURE: Yes, but only if your spouse wants me to. I can change only those who listen to me. I can't change a spouse who does not wish to hear what I say.⁴⁹ But I can change you⁵⁰ and when you have been changed, then you can change your spouse simply by being what you become.⁵¹ But by the way, did you have the impression that *you* have no need of change?

47. First John 5:14 "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

48. Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." ESV

49. John 14:21 "The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him."

50. Second Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, the new has come into being."

51. First Peter 3:1 "In the same way, you wives, be subject to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won over without a word by the behavior of their wives"

RESPONDING TO VERBAL ASSAULT

SPOUSE: Well, whatever. I just don't know how to respond when I am verbally attacked. So what do I say when I am verbally attacked—assuming I want to avoid committing this relational sin you're talking about, what do I say?

SCRIPTURE: How you respond depends on whether you are a husband responding to his wife or a wife responding to her husband because the needs and expectations of each are different. The rules are the same but how the rules are implemented is different.

HUSBAND RESPONDING TO HIS WIFE: When the wife begins to criticize, the husband may respond with a soft denial⁵² (if it is an honest denial⁵³) or with a non-accusatory explanation⁵⁴ if there is one. If he has done wrong then he must immediately offer a sincere and open confession and apology.⁵⁵ But under no circumstances can he criticize, condemn or judge his wife even if she is criticizing, condemning him and judging him.⁵⁶

In framing his response, the first thing the husband should do is find out why she is saying what she is saying and then address the “why” rather than trying to defend himself. If he yields to scripture, he will be placing himself at the mercy of an angry wife who may or may not have a valid complaint. This is called humility⁵⁷ and humility occurs when one's pride and ego are contracted down to who he

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

53. Proverbs 12:22 “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord”

54. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not”

55. James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

56. Matthew 7:1,2 “1“Do not judge, or you will be judged. 2For with the same judgment you pronounce, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

57. Proverbs 11:2 “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” Ephesians 4:2 “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”

really is.⁵⁸ He must intently listen to discover his wife's viewpoint so he can rightly assess how his action or inaction has led her to believe that she has been treated wrongly.

He should understand that the biblical wife has been created to be the author of life and the center of the home.⁵⁹ She was created to be protected and provided for her entire life whether she chooses to work or not.⁶⁰ She was not created to be the leader⁶¹ and she was not created to be the provider. That is biblical role of the husband unless there is no husband.⁶² If she has no husband then she must do what she has to do to righteously care for herself and her children. God will be with her.

Accordingly, the wife's natural orientation is to look to her husband for affirmation, love and support. The biblical wife was created to be loved by her husband,⁶³ to be submissive to him, to rely on him for leadership,⁶⁴ protection and provision.⁶⁵ Because of this, she is vulnerable to him. Whenever he does something that indicates to her that he has breached her trust, such as being critical, disrespectful or flirting with another woman, it is a threat to her sense of security and peace because in the biblical marriage the wife's reliance on the husband is effectively total. Thus, when she is angry, her anger is most

58. Romans 12:3 "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

59. Titus 2:4 "Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not slanderers or addicted to much wine, but teachers of good. In this way they can train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, managers of their households, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be discredited"

60. 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."

61. Ephesians 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church"

62. 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."

63. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

64. Ephesians 5:22 "Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the savior of the body."

65. First Timothy 5:8 "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."

often rooted in her belief (either real or imagined) that her husband does not value her or love her. On the surface, her anger may not appear reasonable because it does not always arise from the initiating cause; it arises from the *implications* of the initiating cause.

If the biblical husband does not understand this, he will confine his response to addressing the initiating cause alone and ignore the engine that is generating the problem and the matter will not be resolved. For instance, if the flirting husband contends that the encounter was a simple social interchange with flirtation intended, with no implication intended, he has not addressed underlying cause. Instead he should stress and demonstrate his love and commitment to his wife by confessing his offense, apologizing and reassuring his wife that it will not happen again.

The husband's goal is therefore not to defend himself by justifying his actions and arguing the surface of the issue. His goal is to address the emotional need that has caused her distress and show her why her trust has not been breached. If the husband has indeed breached her trust, his goal is to show her that her trust can now be renewed because he now sees her significant value, regrets what he has done and asks for her forgiveness.

Because the wife was created to be loved⁶⁶ by a self-sacrificial husband,⁶⁷ to be the life-giver⁶⁸ and the center and the manager of the home⁶⁹ the basic need for the wife is love and support. Without love and support from her husband she cannot be the person that she was created to be. She can go through the motions and do what she has to do, and she probably will, but she cannot be the person that God created her to be without her husband's sincere and continuous love and appreciation because that is what she was created to receive and what he was created to give. If she does not receive love she cannot return it and without funding (money) she cannot manage her household.

66. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives"

67. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her"

68. Psalm 139:13 "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."

69. Proverbs 31:27 "She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness." Titus 2:4,5 "In this way they can train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, managers of their households, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be discredited"

WIFE RESPONDING TO HER HUSBAND: When the husband begins to criticize, the wife may respond with a soft denial⁷⁰ if it is true⁷¹ or with an explanation if there is one, or an apology and confession⁷² if she has done wrong. But under no circumstances can she criticize, condemn or judge her husband.⁷³

In framing her response, the first thing is to find out why he is saying what he is saying and then address the “why” rather than trying to protect her ego. Her ego impedes the scriptural cure, so it is best to let it go up front. If she is going to do this scripturally, her ego will be undefended and at her husband’s mercy. This is called humility.⁷⁴ Her pride and ego must be contracted down to who she really is.⁷⁵

The biblical husband has been created to be the protector and the provider for the wife and the family.⁷⁶ This God-given duty is what motivates him to ensure that his wife and family are happy and content. And he has been created to love his wife.⁷⁷ Therefore, when his wife is discontent, it means far more to him than a dispute over this or that. It means failure. If she is demeaning or controlling this is an affront to his responsibility as a husband. To some men repeated failure compels them to abandon attempting to make her happy.

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

71. Proverbs 12:22 “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord”

72. James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

73. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not”

74. Proverbs 11:2 “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” Ephesians 4:2 “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”

75. Romans 12:3 “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

76. 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.”

77. Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”

In order to fulfill his responsibility as protector and provider, the husband was created to be the leader of his family.⁷⁸ But there is no leadership if the wife does not submit to his leadership because leadership arises from those who are led as much or more as it does from those who lead. When the biblical wife yields to God's command to respect her husband,⁷⁹ she ignites the motivation of her husband to fulfill his biblical role to effectively give himself up for his wife and family.⁸⁰ We see here a magnificent balance in scripture.^{81†}

Because of the duty imposed upon him by his Creator, the basic need for the husband is not love, but respect. Without his wife's respect he cannot fulfill his God-given function. He cannot be the person that God has created him to be. It is therefore the wife who holds the key to her husband's motivation and his success.

SPOUSE: You are, of course, aware that many marriages between Christians simply do not follow the structure of the husband provider and the submissive wife.

SCRIPTURE: I am aware of this.

SPOUSE: Then you are aware that you are not going to be making any friends by saying the things that you are saying about the function of the husband and the wife.

SCRIPTURE. I am not here for the purpose of making friends. I am here for the purpose of describing how man and woman have been created and how they can find their greatest happiness.⁸² Many people have chosen different methods to structure their families and that is their free choice.

78. Ephesians 5:22-24 "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

79. Ephesians 5:33 "let the wife see that she respects her husband"

80. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."

81. † If the husband is fully yielded to scripture and is a faithful lover, provider and the protector of the wife and children, then the wife will be motivated to become the biblical wife. And if the wife is fully yielded to scripture, the husband will be motivated to become the biblical husband.

82. Psalm 119:130 "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." KJV Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path."

SPOUSE: Ok. And I respect that, but there are many Christian marriages that are successful where both husband and wife work.

SCRIPTURE: Some women have been created to work and follow a career⁸³ and children do not need to be nurtured forever. And some families have no choice in the matter. There are single parent homes where a single mother or a single father has to work to support and be both mother and father to the children. To the committed father or the mother who find themselves in that situation and who are striving for righteousness, God provides a supernatural strength.⁸⁴

And there are other homes where both parents have to work. Scripture points to the ideal where possible. But sometimes the ideal is not possible. God provides in all circumstances;⁸⁵ and He takes up our slack when circumstances require a different structure in the home.

THE CYCLE THAT KILLS THE MARRIAGE

SPOUSE: You have said a lot about criticism and judgment and I can see how it is relevant. But I am still not convinced that criticizing your spouse is wrong.

SCRIPTURE: Criticism is never necessary in any form, especially in the form of retribution. You cannot initiate it and you cannot use it in your response:

83. See Proverbs 31:14 "She [a noble woman] is like the merchant ships bringing her food from afar." She brings new value into the family from outside the family.

84. Isaiah 41:10 "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." Isaiah 40:31 "But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." First Corinthians 16:13 "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

85. Philippians 4:19 "God will supply every need of yours according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus" Matthew 6:31 "do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all." ESV

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁸⁶†

The Greek word for “judge” in the original Greek is “krino” which means to judge or evaluate or criticize. Matthew 7:1 is telling you never to judge or criticize or condemn any person ever. Condemnation includes holding a grudge or refusing to forgive and re-establish a relationship. It means refusing to fully accept someone because of a disagreement. Condemnation includes the process of searching and finding character flaws in others. Every human is flawed from the start⁸⁷† and everyone will inevitably sin.⁸⁸

God is telling mankind that He created everyone to be less than perfect. So don't spend your time being concerned with the imperfections of others (or your own for that matter). Just accept everyone the way they are. That is not to say that you should not deal wisely with others and confront every problematic situation with straightforward wisdom. Just because you accept someone for who he or she is does not mean that you have to ask them to dinner. Limit your relationships when appropriate. And, in some cases, limit your relationships just because you want to. Condemnation is sin. Limiting relationships is not, unless the relationship is a marriage. Scripture defines the scope of the marital relationship and it is total mutual acceptance, as if the two are one flesh.⁸⁹

Obey Matthew 7:1 to the letter. It is God's intervention in the cycle that kills the marriage.

86. Matthew 7:1-3 NKJV † It is not necessary to pass judgment on your brother in order to remove the speck in his eye. One need only recognize sin and, without criticism or condemnation of the person himself, inform him of the sin. Also see John 7:25 where Jesus addresses the Pharisees and says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” He was quoting from Isaiah 11:3 which is a prophetic passage about Himself. Therefore, John 7:25 does not alter or contradict Matthew 7:1.

87. Psalm 51:5 “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” † Here David speaks not simply of his own birth but of all mankind.

88. Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

89. Mark 10:8 “And the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

SPOUSE: What cycle?

SCRIPTURE: It is the vicious Cycle of Judgment and Offense.⁹⁰
Unless there is obedience to scripture, the cycle grinds marriages down. The secret to saving the marriage is to stop the cycle at any cost.



90. See Appendix *Cycle of Judgment and Offense*

Not Taking Offense

JUDGE NOT

MATTHEW 7:1

Once a young father was standing in line with his 4 year old son. The little boy was wandering around, as all 4 year old boys do. Before the father could stop him, the young boy wandered up to the backside of a 18 year old girl and placed his hand exactly where he shouldn't. The girl squeaked and wheeled around. She was offended and angry, but when she saw that it was a 4 year old boy, she smiled and turned back to her companion and laughed.

What had happened? The offence that she felt disappeared when she saw that the offender was too young to be guilty of an intentional inappropriate act. So, it was not the *act* that offended her. She was offended by what she believed to be the *motive* for the act, not the act itself. When she discovered that the motive was not what she thought it was, the act itself became irrelevant.

People become angry because they believe reason for the act to be an affront. But sometimes, especially in marriages, something may appear to be a slight or an insult when it was not.

How easily are we offended? The answer to that question is an indication of our spiritual strength. Do we conclude that our spouse is unkind or manipulative and then look for confirmation to solidify our opinion? This is precisely what Matthew 7:1 addresses. Scripture does not tell us to ignore what someone does, nor does it tell us to give our spouse the benefit of the doubt it tells us not to judge at all.

So what does that mean for the girl who was offended? It means that she does not judge even if the offender was a 30 year old man instead of a 4 year old boy. It means not to conclude that the 30 year old man is bad, good or perverted. It means not to judge him to be anything.

Now, she may *respond* differently to him than she did to the 4 year old. She may slap him in her defense or immediately move away or call a policeman or warn other women about him, but scripture commands her not to judge him. Scripture forbids her to conclude anything about his character. Take action when necessary but take no offense, says scripture. Walk away and leave the offense behind; do not take it with you. That judgment is reserved for God alone.

What effect does Matthew 7:1 have on marriage? It has the same effect on marriage as it does on one's life. It frees us from the burden of judging and from taking offense. It does not limit what we can do in response to an unpleasant situation; nor does it weaken us. All it does is cause us to confine our responses to the act itself, and not judge the person who committed the act.

Refusing to judge is not just a method for dealing with a difficult marriage. It is a lifestyle (a very pleasant lifestyle) that results in a wonderful marital relationship because without condemnation, love flows like water.

In addition to a refusal to judge, forgiveness is absolutely essential to the return of love. Forgiveness is the penicillin against the infection of resentment and retribution. Forgiveness is healing and freedom. It may be hard and it may be a long time coming. But it works amazingly well.

The practical, experiential effect of a lifestyle without judgment and unforgiveness is a profound sense of freedom and peace. This is the freedom promised by Jesus Christ to all those who obey:

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.¹

We are to live in a sea of forgiveness^{2†} and never hold a grudge.³

Unfortunately, being non-judgmental and forgiving can result in a very one-sided conflict when we are judged by another.



1. John 8:36

2. Matthew 6:14,15 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” † This unsettling passage demonstrates how seriously God takes unforgiveness. However, this passage does not mean that one can lose salvation by refusing (or failing) to forgive. It means the same thing as Matthew 7:1 that God will relate to us in this life according to how we relate to others. It means that God will relate to us with the same generosity with which we relate to others.

3. Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled” Ephesians 4:31 “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

The One-Sided Conflict

NOT FUN BUT LEAVES NO SCARS

Most arguments begin with a statement of dissatisfaction made with the intent to “work through” something. But they often digress into a conflict. Discussions escalate into conflicts when the parties insist on demonstrating why they are right and the other is wrong. Both parties are fully convinced that they are right and the other is wrong. This digresses into criticisms and unforgiveness, judgment, mutual criticism and insults. These conflicts accomplish little else but destruction. They must be stopped at any cost. But how?

Conflicts are avoided (and stopped) when one of the spouses yields to scripture. When one spouse obeys scripture, the entire scenario changes.

If only one of the spouses obeys scripture, the conflict becomes transformed into a session where one party vents unforgiveness and condemnation and the scriptural spouse simply refuses to respond in kind. This can be a difficult road for the scripturally obedient spouse because Matthew 7:1 limits his or her response to explanations and non-retaliatory soft replies.¹ This results not only in losing the argument but also to being exposed to the undefended anger and condemnation of the unscriptural spouse—and that hurts. The cut is deep when one cannot strike back and balance out the offense.

But consider the benefit. The Cycle of Judgment and Offense² can no longer turn. The conflict calms down and when it is over the spouse who has yielded to scripture will have committed no relational sin. The forum for defense and condemnation has been removed and the aggressive spouse is left with the realization that he or she has injured the other spouse.

Eventually the yielding spouse heals, but the aggressor is still guilty and knows it. This guilt does not heal with time and the balm of self-justification is far less effective when there is no responding condemnation. True reconciliation requires a sincere confession, a repentance and a strong dose of humility.

1. Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

2. See Appendix *Cycle of Judgment and Offense*

In order to re-establish a relationship with Christ and reacquire the peace of God,³ the offender must confess and repent both to God and to the spouse. Anyone who knows Christ,⁴ His eternal life⁵ and His peace⁶ will do whatever is necessary to preserve it—even repent and confess. And when the offender reaches the point where this occurs, reconciliation occurs and the offender will think twice about placing himself in that uncomfortable position again.

Here we see one of the numerous reasons for Second Corinthians 6:14 which prohibits believers from marrying unbelievers.⁷ If an aggressive spouse has no relationship with Christ, then the motivation to preserve a relationship with Christ does not exist. A personal need for equanimity may well be a motivation for an apology, but if that spouse does not know God, then the healing of one's relationship with Christ will be neither a motivation nor a reality.

Marital conflicts can be like aggressive tennis players expressing their anger and distaste with powerful strokes aimed at hitting the other spouse. Sometimes the ball strikes the other spouse and other times the opponent returns the ball full force and strikes the aggressor instead. But no matter who does what, both players are wounded and when the game is over. They are emotionally exhausted. On the surface they may walk to the net and shake hands and eventually put the game behind them. But the pain and the memories remain.

Eventually the reconciliations become less and less complete and it becomes increasingly easy for each player to simply walk away and avoid the useless handshake.

But one day game time comes again. One of the players draws on a reservoir of self-justification and feels the power of anger welling up inside. The anger explodes and the tennis ball strikes the other spouse full force. The angry spouse feels the emotional release that care-

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

4. John 14:21 “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

5. John 17:3 “This is eternal life that you may know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.”

6. Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness ...”

7. Second Corinthians 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership can righteousness have with wickedness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness?”

fully chosen vengeance provides and waits for the inevitable counter-stroke. But it does not come. Frustrated, the angry spouse dredges up old grudges and wraps them around the ball and drives it home again. It hits the mark square, but again there is no response. Then there is a third strike but not so hard this time. And for the third time there is no counter-stroke. The aggressor exults in an apparent victory, but soon it becomes apparent that the opponent has deprived him of the game itself and denied him the justification that each counter-stroke provides. There is no game without two players. He fires one last tennis ball into an empty court and eventually leaves to face the complex of his frustrations—and his God—alone.

His resentments, grudges and condemnations will prevent him from experiencing the love that he once felt, but with no tennis ball flying back at him, he finds it much easier to reflect on his own faults. Eventually the aggressor will realize that the value of a relationship with someone who refuses to injure him far outweighs the sordid release found in the sins of criticism and condemnation.

This, however, does not mean that the injured spouse must remain silent. Into the complex of sin and conflict scripture weaves its provisions for biblical confrontation. This is called “biblical reproof.”



Biblical Reproof

CONFRONTATION WITHOUT CRITICISM

Biblical reproof is confrontation without condemnation or criticism. When reproof is necessary, scripture provides a way to do it without sin.

Matthew 18:15 is a confrontational scripture. In it, Christ gives us instruction for biblical reproof against a brother in Christ who has sinned against us.

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.^{1†}

Taken together with other scriptures, the proper way to confront someone who has wronged us is this:

1. Understand that the goal is to reconcile (to “gain your brother”) not to complain, correct, criticize or justify.
2. The person who has been wronged must have been wronged by a Biblical sin, not a mistake.
3. The meeting must take place in private.
4. The wrong must be stated without accusation, condemnation or criticism (Matthew 7:1).
5. The person who has been wronged must take the initiative and approach the other to attempt to reconcile (“if your brother sins against you, go to him”).

In Matthew 5:22, Christ tells us the extent of the evil found in judgmental words and the importance of reconciliation. It is no accident that both of these concepts are contained in the same passage. The message is clear. Reconciliation is imperative and when you go to reconcile make sure that you are not angry.

1. Matthew 18:15 † This scripture later provides for the ostracizing the unrepentant sinner. However, this provision never applies to a marriage because in a marriage the parties are treated as one flesh, one person (Mark 10:8)

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be subject to the fire of hell. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift...²

Matthew 18:15 tells us that our purpose is to win him back the brother who has sinned against us.

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.³

Thus, Matthew 18:15 and Matthew 5:22 place the burden of reconciliation upon the one who has been offended, not the offender. And Matthew 5:22 tells us that if we fail to reconcile or make a sincere attempt at reconciliation, our relationship with God will be effectively suspended: Don't come to God (offer a gift at the altar) until you have reconciled to your brother.

It is evident from Matthew 5:22 (reconciliation) and Matthew 7:1 (judgment) and Matthew 6:14 (forgiveness) that God is not going to honor our sin with His presence. He has no more desire to be around when we sin than we desire to be around when our children sin. It hurts.

It is fairly clear from these passages and others that biblical righteousness is largely the opposite of the commonplace lifestyles of the world—but immensely more rewarding.

Now consider the unbeliever. He lives in the world without the presence of God and things like reconciliation, non-judgment and forgiveness are simply constructs of "ethics," which arise from the fact that all men have the knowledge of good and evil. But there is no Bible in the life of the unbeliever and there is no substance to his ethical considerations. He has no substantive reason to be a person

2. Matthew 5:22-24

3. Matthew 18:15

who forgives because in a Godless world there are no absolutes and therefore no substantive right or wrong. The “ethics” of the Godless is an exercise in impotency.

The unbeliever, the skeptic or even the agnostic who cannot find God concludes that since he can't find Him, God does not exist (truly one of the most myopic conclusions in this history of man⁴). Therefore, there is no God, nothing is supernatural, life is meaningless, morality is artificial, there is no sin and forgiveness and reconciliation have no more substantive meaning than morning coffee.

Worldly wisdom places the burden to initiate reconciliation upon the one who gave the offense, not the person who was offended. But scripture places the obligation upon the *offended* party, not the offender. So, if we have been offended it is our obligation to initiate the reconciliation. This is to be done with the express purpose of reconciliation, not condemnation.

These two confrontational scriptures show how distant most of us are from the scriptural norm and they show us how the word of God is the opposite of the wisdom of the world. It is as if the ethics of the world are a mirror image of scripture: it's backwards.

The scriptures that describe biblical reproof are not intended to give us an opportunity to “tell someone off,” or “set the record straight (there is no record),” or to “vent” against someone. They are for winning the sinful party back again because the goal is soul, not glory. *It is relationships that reform behavior and turn people from sin, not criticism and correction.* It is as if an intruder has come into a home and grabbed the baby (the relationship). The world screams, “Get the intruder!” Scripture screams, “Get the baby!”

Another reason for the requirement that the one who has been wronged initiate the reconciliation is because the sin of unforgiveness in the *victim* is most often worse than the sin of aggression in the aggressor because the sin of unforgiveness is *continuous*. It resides in the mind and heart of the injured party and kills from within. It stays there because the victim believes that it is justified.

Another reason for this provision is that the victim needs to forgive in order to be healed and the scriptural requirement that the victim go to the aggressor compels the victim to address that forgiveness

4. God does not disclose Himself to everyone. See John 17:3, 14:21, 14:23.

and actually forgive in order to be able to go to the aggressor party to win him back. It is forgiveness alone that heals. The world preaches justice and retribution. Scripture preaches forgiveness.

Unforgiveness is like a man ringing a church bell by pulling the bell rope. It takes consistent effort. He hears each ring as a demand for justice, but in reality is just clamor. As long as he rings it, he must devote energy and attention to it. It has an effect on his life and on other relationships. When he releases the rope and forgives, the bell continues to ring on its own for a time, but eventually it stops, forgiveness happens and he is free.⁵

In all of the scriptures that teach about relationships, the concept of justice is never included. Justice, righteous justice, is all through scripture, but it is never a part of how we relate to others. In fact Jesus commands us to do the opposite, “Judge not.”⁶ ♦ The reason is because justice—and the demand for justice—should never be an issue in a relationship. Justice is the issue only when God is judging. Love is the issue when man is relating.

Sometimes the wrong is serious enough to call for something stronger called rebuke, and the Bible tells us to rebuke but only when we are sinned against.

If your brother sins against you, rebuke him;
and if he repents, forgive him. ⁷

Where a brother is caught in a transgression, those who are spiritual should gently restore him.⁸

5. Matthew 5:22-24

6. Matthew 7:1 ♦ In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are more than 50 verses that address the concept of justice but none of these refer to justice (judgment) in the context of human relationships. In view of the fact that judgment of others is prevalent and commonplace in human relationships, it is a striking testimony to the divine authorship of scripture that not any of these passages endorse it. The issue is reserved for Christ in Matthew 7:1 (“Judge not”). All references to judgment are reserved for an act by the state or the church.

7. Matthew 18:15

8. Galatians 6:1 “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” ESV

In a biblical rebuke, it is always against a clear and uncontested sin and there no instance in scripture where a scriptural and proper rebuke was given more than once. And there is no instance in scripture where a rebuke is given defensively following an accusation.⁹

No scripture should ever be used to justify sin, especially this one. Biblical confrontation should not be used to condemn; and it should not be used repeatedly. Its purpose is only to inform. If there is no significant change, repetition, nagging and more criticism will not help.

On the surface, scripture leaves us with a weakness. It deprives us of recrimination, counter-accusations and justified criticism. Faith can be strained to the breaking point when we are condemned and judged by another and cannot respond in kind. The sting of insult and rejection demands retribution, justice and revenge, but when we refuse that demand, we rise above it and prevent more sin from being thrown into the boiling pot. We are injured, to be sure, but our injuries heal and when it is over we leave no sin behind.

Eventually the aggressor spouse will see that a pleasant relationship is not only possible but much preferable to his or her own anger. He or she discovers that the continual maintenance of a wall of defense is simply no longer necessary. Swords and shields are heavy and bell ropes require mental resources that are far better utilized elsewhere. Life is much easier without them.

Peace comes dropping slowly and love stands innocent in the doorway. But we must invite her in. She brings three distinct but unexpected gifts with her when she comes.



9. ◇ Here again we see a consistency in scripture never to permit natural human tendencies to encroach upon God's structure of relationships.

Love's Gifts

THREE INVALUABLE GIFTS

Once upon a time a preacher died and went to heaven. St. Peter met him at the pearly gate and welcomed him. "We've been waiting for you," said St. Peter, "Come on in." The man was ecstatic about seeing heaven, but before going in, he asked St. Peter to do him a favor.

"St. Peter," he said, "I was a Baptist pastor back on earth and I preached fire and brimstone every Sunday and I always wondered what hell is like. So, before I go into heaven, can you show me hell?"

St. Peter smiled and said, "Well, Pastor, we don't get that request very often, but I am happy to do it. Just grab on to my arm and we are off." They flew downward all day and arrived in hell at dinner time. They heard a loud commotion from the dining hall and peeked inside. That night the devil had removed everyone's elbows so when they could not bring the food to their mouths. Whenever they moved their arms they would strike the person next to them and all they could do with their food was to throw it or try to drop it in their mouths. Everyone was angry. It was pandemonium and the devil loved it.

After a few moments, the pastor said, "My goodness, Saint Peter, that is terrible!"

St. Peter replied, "Oh, well not really. Sometimes we do that in heaven, too. But in heaven, you see, they feed each other."

It is love and acceptance that the spouses feed to each other in their marriage. In a declining marriage the spouses try to feed themselves, but they cannot because their need is to be loved and accepted by the other spouse and only the other spouse can provide that love and acceptance. Life's banquet is a continuing feast of love and acceptance given and received by people. Marriage is the richest and the finest part of it.

Sometimes a wife needs an extra kiss or an unexpected gift or a certain kind of kindness. A husband may need to have his wife sit beside him at parties or feel her hand on his shoulder. These are little things, easy things that only a spouse can do give. But, as little as they are, sometimes they are just too much trouble. Sometimes spouses

withhold them and sometimes they withhold the big things like love, kindness, companionship, acceptance, support, sex or encouragement. If spouses don't feed each other, they will not be fed—at least by the other spouse...

We can demand and we can dominate. We can get even and we can hold grudges, condemn, slander and never forgive if we want to. But we can never feed ourselves.

We feed each other in a marriage is by giving. Sometimes we give overt, material things; we serve one another; we are patient with each other, accept one another, give respect, kindness and tenderness to one another. But perhaps the most important things we can give are given by how we respond to conflict. When we give these gifts, God strengthens our marriage and uses the sin of the other spouse to do it.

THE GIFT OF FREEDOM

The one who refuses to criticize when being disparaged or criticized gives the gift of freedom. By refusing to respond in kind to critical attacks, the biblical spouse proves to the other spouse just how far the offending spouse may go without fear of retribution. The shape of this freedom is drawn with the pen of the emotional pain that outlines the hurt that has been inflicted and the patience and forgiveness extended to the offender. The worse the attack is, the greater the gift will be.

When the husband is angry at his wife and she refuses to respond in kind, she is saying to him “This is how much you are free to say without fearing that I will hurt you in return.”

To the wife whose husband has refused to condemn her when she was angry, the words that he never said will later sing of love, a love that is unshakable in the midst of anger and condemnation. “No matter what you do or what you say, I will always love you.”

These unspoken words are more convincing than the most eloquent of easy promises. And their impact is lasting. There are no “eggshells” there that you need worry about breaking. You are safe no matter what you say. This is the gift of freedom and safety.

THE GIFT OF STABILITY

The one who refuses to condemn when condemned gives the gift of stability. By refusing to respond in kind, the one who refuses to criticize demonstrates in no uncertain terms that he or she will permit neither the relationship nor the family to be shaken by the weakness of the other spouse. The refusal to respond with judgment and criticism demonstrates that even anger and rejection is not strong enough to dislodge the biblical spouse—or the marriage.

The angry spouse probes and expects to find a shifting sand beneath a marital vow but finds bedrock instead. This is the gift of stability and security.

THE GIFT OF YOU

The finest gift that a wife can give a husband is the gift of herself free of the threat of anger, dissatisfaction, control, criticisms or loss of respect. The finest gift that a husband can give to a wife is the gift of himself free of the threat of anger, retribution, blaming, control or the loss of love. This gift cannot be given by words. It can be given only by consistent and tested refusals to condemn and criticize—by refusals to hold grudges or remember wrongs, and by confession of sins rather than justification. It is the gift of trusting humility and oneness, the gift of peace. It is the gift of the only real reason for the marriage: the gift of you. These are the gifts that bring love back again.



Ironically, these gifts arise directly from conflicts. They are examples of how God turns the tables and brings back the love that the spouses thought was gone for good. The entrance of God's Word brings light.¹ He creates love from hate and faith from despair. He takes the shattered marriage and makes it new. He brings beauty from ashes. He is God. This is a miracle. Miracles are what God does.

1. Psalm 119:130 "The entrance of thy words giveth light"

Saving marriages, transforming broken hearts and homes into joyful ones, changing tragedy into victory, transforming death into life and bringing love back to a the dead marriage is what God does.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me [Christ], because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of our God's vengeance, to comfort all who mourn, to console the mourners in Zion—to give them a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and a garment of praise for a spirit of despair. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified....²

God transforms the pain of verbal assault into incomparable gifts that are given *by the injured spouse*. And it is these gifts and others that transform the other spouse. We can't see their effect when we give them because we are often dealing with a dark tangle of conflicting emotions, condemnations and justifications and the effect of the gifts is delayed. But when we yield, we can watch as God simply skips over all blaming. He skips over who did what and who deserved what and what you owe me and what I owe you or what I need to do to get even. He simply strolls past them all as if they were a waste of time and then He turns back and says to you "I am forgiving it *all*. Are you?"

Love is best.



Families die and children are forever scarred when angry parents refuse to abstain from verbal assaults. They make their case to an absent judge and to an audience of terrified children. The words that they say are rank sin, fruitless arguments made in a vacuum to a brick wall. Useless death.

2. Isaiah 61:3

But when we absorb the sins of others and give three gifts in return, neither God nor His peace is not far away. Choosing to be the person who does not respond in kind is the wisest and most rewarding choice that a believer can make.³ Being that person provides both the non-threatening acceptance and the reasons for the erring spouse to change. It is the dawn of a new day.

But continued conflict, inspired by anger and legitimized by self-justification is a lighted match to gasoline. When you take offense and respond in kind you apply that lighted match to the gasoline and whose fault it is at that point is quite irrelevant.

One of the very best examples of how the fire can be avoided is found in the famous children's book *The Wind in the Willows*, where we find a sterling example of accidental righteousness.



3. Matthew 5:39 “whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

The Confrontation of Mole

ACCIDENTAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the *The Wind in the Willows*¹ we read of the adventures of Froggy, Ratty and Mole. The great appeal of the book is not their adventures, but how these creatures relate. Their secret, although they do not understand it, is Matthew 7:1: they never judge. Let us consider one potentially ominous confrontation that was entirely diffused by their unwitting compliance to scripture.

Mole and Ratty are on the road and they may not be back for a long time. Mole wants to take a detour to have one last look at his home, but Ratty refused. Later on Mole dealt with his emotions.

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out between the upheavals of his chest ...
'I know its a - shabby, dingy little place,' he sobbed forth at last, brokenly: 'not like - your cozy quarters - or Toad's beautiful hall - or Badgers great house - but it was my own little home - and I was fond of it ... and when I called and you would not listen, Rat - and everything came back to me with a rush - and I wanted it! - O dear, O dear! - and you *wouldn't* turn back Ratty - and I had to leave it, though I was smelling it all the time. I thought my heart would break. We might have just gone and had one look at it, Ratty - only one look - it was close by - but you wouldn't turn back, Ratty, you wouldn't turn back! O dear!'

The Rat stared straight in front of him, saying nothing, only patting Mole gently on the shoulder. After a time he muttered gloomily, 'I see it all now! What a pig I have been! A pig - that's me! Just a pig - a plain pig.'²

1. Grahame, Kenneth, *Wind in the Willows* (Templar Publishing, London). *The Wind in the Willows* is a very soft children's story first published in 1908. The book is about the adventures of a frog, a rat and a mole.

2. *Wind in the Willows*, page 86

Notice how Mole frames his complaint. His entire statement is a description of what happened and a statement of his own feelings. He does not criticize Ratty himself; he says nothing about *the person* of Ratty. When he reaches the point where one would expect that to occur, he stops short and exclaims simply, “Oh dear!”

Because Mole did not criticize, Ratty took no offense. And because Ratty took no offense, he had no need to defend himself. Without the sting of judgment, Rat was left with the unvarnished truth and he was free to examine himself. “I see it all now!” He says. “What a pig I have been! A pig - that’s me!”³

Now consider the same confrontation when relational sin is introduced.

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out between the upheavals of his chest ...
‘I know its a - shabby, dingy little place,’ he sobbed forth at last, brokenly: ‘not like - your cozy quarters - or Toad’s beautiful hall - or Badgers great house - but it was my own little home - and I was fond of it ... and we were so near to it Rat, but you were so caught up with yourself, you wouldn’t take the slightest detour to let me have one last look at my home. I asked you, but you would not listen. You never listen, do you Rat? Not ever. You only think of yourself. You are a pig, Ratty, just a plain pig.

It is not difficult to see that Rat would have responded quite differently if Mole had said that. Mole’s condemnation and criticism would have placed Rat on the defensive and demanded retaliation. It would have effectively made it impossible for Rat to respond constructively because Rat would have been preoccupied with defending himself. It is only when Ratty *himself* recognizes his selfishness that change can occur.

If Mole tells rat that he is a pig, then he effectively prevents Rat from examining himself and coming to the same conclusion because as soon as the “pig” accusation is made, Rat will begin telling himself

3. See Appendix *Analysis of the Confrontation of Mole*

why he is not a pig and planning an equally stinging retort. It is only Mole who can enable Rat to re-examine himself and Mole does exactly that when he obeys Matthew 7:1.

But if Mole had not obeyed Matthew 7:1, then the offending criticisms would have caused Rat to defend himself and Mole would have become an adversary.

A pig, Mole? Who is the pig here? Who was it that wanted to take us off course just so he could look at an abandoned house? That is unreasonable, Mole. It's stupid and if there is a pig here, it is you, a pig, a stupid pig. Not me, Mole. I have done nothing but help you and guide you during the entire trip, but you are not satisfied. You are never satisfied. You always think of yourself, don't you Mole. You are the pig here and you know it!

Do you feel it? Do you feel the death in those words? It's there. They are sin and they are death, just as bright and twinkling as the lights on Satan's Christmas tree.

Jesus Christ is telling us, "Just don't say words like that!" The words are sin whether they are true or not and their impact renders self-examination practically impossible. And without self-examination, both repentance and apology are impossible. And it is only with repentance and apology that true reconciliation is possible.

But let us suppose that Rat and Mole did injure each other and now want to reconcile. What should they do? Should they go to counseling and learn how to relate or how to fight fair? Should they try to determine just who was at fault? Perhaps they should go back and measure how far off the road Mole wanted Ratty to take him so they could determine whether Mole was justified in asking Rat to take the detour. Or perhaps they should determine just how selfish Ratty really is? A review of all of Rat's past offenses, perhaps? Do you think that is going to help? No. More death will not help. All of that is just the same old arguments clothed in different colors. How then can the relationship be mended?

The true remedy is right out of scripture. The very first thing to do is to stop all verbal and silent relational sin (criticism, condemnation and unforgiveness) so each party will be free to examine himself.

Then, when all relational sin has ceased, each party, apologizes for the relational sin that he or she has just committed and each party forgives.⁴ Each party goes to God and confesses his or her sin and is forgiven.⁵ Each partner forgives from the heart and never brings it up again.⁶ That is the scriptural way to resolve the dispute.



When this is done, the parties have opened the door to the presence of Christ:

The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him.⁷

Jesus replied, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”⁸

The confession and forgiveness process demonstrates to each party that the other party values the relationship more than prevailing in an argument. And when both parties understand that about the other party, the battle is won and the war is winding down. Love returns as sin leaves. Love is the cure.



One of the greatest motivations in biblical Christianity is the profound inner peace that comes from knowing God.

4. James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”

5. First John 1:8,9 “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

6. Colossians 3:13 “Forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you”

7. John 14:21

8. John 14:23

My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do
I give to you. Do not let your hearts be trou-
bled, nor fearful.⁹

However, the young Christian soon discovers that God's peace is short lived when he sins and to get it back he will have to humble himself, admit a wrong. That process of admitting a wrong and asking for forgiveness is not terribly pleasant and it can be expensive. Hence the penitent Christian becomes motivated to avoid sin.

It *all* turns on knowing God. Actually and experientially knowing God and experiencing His eternal life in this life. And that's what it is all about.

And this is eternal life, that they may know
You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom
You have sent.¹⁰



9. John 14:27

10. John 17:3

The Return of Love

A SUMMATION

The sheer size of the task of remaking a dead marriage makes it daunting. But the miracle does not begin when the matter is finished because the miracle does not depend on our strength. The miracle depends on our willingness to obey, on the extent of our surrender. The challenge is not what we can accomplish; the challenge is how yielded we can be to God's word. We yield; God works. It is that simple. God has to do it, you see, because we have no power to create love. We never did.



Outside the vortex of condemnation and justification, there is an absolutely magnificent life filled with peace, assurance and love. Love from God flows like water through an open spigot because God *is* love.¹ Relational sin closes the spigot; and Matthew 7:1 and 6:14 open it again.

One has only to forgive and refuse to criticize to begin to experience it. This means to entirely forgo all adversarial response to all the painful words and deeds; it means to entirely forgo all condemnation even if it is fully justified. It may feel like insanity and common sense will scream out "How foolish!" But it is the door to immense personal freedom and peace and the return of true love. A miracle? Indeed, but not the believe-hard-enough type miracle. It is the "show me" type of miracle, the cash and carry miracle. So try it for yourself. See what happens when you truly surrender to Him.

We are much like chess pieces. Each one has only certain moves that it can make and certain moves that it cannot make. Some chess pieces can jump and some can move to the side or straight across the board, but none of them can do it all. We are like those chess pieces.

When we are playing the game and someone makes a move, we can't blame the piece if it cannot do everything we would like it to. We accept it as it is and with its limitations and so does the person on the other side of the board. We accept the pieces as they are. The big difference between the chess game and life is that we rarely see our-

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

selves as one of the pieces with limitations. We take serious comfort in the belief that we are not in the least guilty of the things that we do and we will not permit anything to unsettle that conviction.

We are remarkably similar to an Irish Setter I once knew. When he settled into his chair (my chair) nothing on earth could dislodge that dog. No argument could sway him, no enticement could tempt him and when brute force was finally applied the dog would howl and lock himself in position like a frozen pancake. I could have leaned him up against a wall.

Perhaps the reason why Christ spoke the words of Matthew 7:1 was because He knew the lengths to which man will go to justify himself in order to rest comfortably in his chair without guilt or responsibility. "Do not judge," Christ tells us. He's not going to move out of the chair until he's good and ready. Judging him is not going to do any good.

I often wonder if my earthly Father had read Matthew 7:1 because when we would come upon the dog in the chair, he would remark quietly, "Don't even try..."

That is Matthew 7:1. Don't try to dislodge the other spouse from a comfortable position of self-justification. It will do no good. The other spouse himself must decide to change or change will never occur. And critical words do not help; remember, he bites.

So what can change the other spouse. Love can change the other spouse.

Criticism, judgment and unforgiveness necessitate the construction of a wall of defense, a wall that is practically impenetrable. But the wall requires maintenance and continual repair in the form of self-justification and blame avoidance; it is strong but it is burdensome to maintain. The way to penetrate the wall is not to attack it; that will cause it to be strengthened. The way to overcome it is to remove the need for it.

When there is no longer a need to maintain it, the wall will fall under its own weight and leave the wall-less spouse free to address reality.^{2†} And as long as the other spouse obeys scripture and never gives reason to reconstruct the wall, the wall will disappear for good.

It is hard to imagine a less effective way to change the other spouse is to attack with a storm of verbal knives intended to correct the conception that the other spouse has of himself.

When only one of the parties obeys scripture and decides to break the cycle, the disputes become one-sided. The accusing spouse may judge, criticize, condemn and justify their own unforgiveness and anger. This leaves the biblical spouse with nothing to say in response other than a soft answer,³ a soft explanation or a confession.⁴

As a result, the aggressor spouse will continue to criticize and win the argument. But the victory is short lived because without an opponent, the aggressor has been deprived of a forum. And when the arguments and justifications have no audience, there is no ongoing dispute that can obscure the accuser's own guilt.

We are often afraid to reconcile because the process of reconciliation requires vulnerability. By refusing to force the aggressive spouse to defend himself or herself, the biblical spouse has placed the aggressor in a position to reconcile without threat of emotional injury. Hence, scripture commands us not take advantage of the aggressor's vulnerabilities (do not judge). This is especially true if you are in the right. Tread very carefully. If the aggressor is not attacked, he will be free to reconsider his own actions. The goal is to ensure that he is completely safe to examine himself because *nothing else* will compel the aggressor to relinquish self-justification and examine himself.

Psychiatrists and counselors learned this more than a century ago: always be accepting, never condemning. Psychiatrists are practiced in the art of acceptance and non-judgment. And, from a different perspective, the smart lawyer will always give his opponent an opportunity to lose graciously.

2. † Romans 8:1 becomes more effective when condemnation from the other spouse ceases, "Therefore there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." When we condemn, we violate not only Matthew 7:1 but Romans 8:1 as well.

3. Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turneth away wrath" KJV

4. James 5:16 "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

Which spouse are you? Are you the aggressor who cannot see your own faults or are you the victim? But don't answer that question. Let me answer it for you. You are both of them. We all are both of them.

The key to this process in a marriage is to understand that *both* spouses must relinquish all self-justification and examine themselves with brutal honesty because *both* spouses are *always* at fault to one extent or another. But one spouse must step out first and do it. This and this alone will result in mutual apologies and the open door for love to return and grow until the darkness of the past has been obscured by the sheer joy of a new love. There is no limit to the love of God that is expressed in a marriage that has no continuing relational sin. That is the love that *never* fails.

Love returns when we permit it to do so. Why wait? If both spouses agree and if there are there is no significant relational sin, love can return *overnight*.

So forget about all that working through it all business. God skips right over it and so can you. Forgive entirely and go for the miracle!



Knowing God

I WILL LOVE HIM AND DISCLOSE
MYSELF TO HIM
JOHN 14:21

Knowing God is the most marvelous experience that anyone can ever experience—by far. Nothing can compare to it.

To live without Him is to live with emptiness inside. For many, life is a continual effort to fill that emptiness—or to avoid looking at it. Simply admitting to the existence of the void and the meaninglessness of life that goes with it, is called nihilism, which is materialism.

Men try to fill the void but they cannot. The void cannot be filled because it is not really a void. It is spiritual death. Therefore, the only solution to the void is spiritual life.

Spiritual death is the result of sin.¹ Therefore, the very first thing we must do is to obtain forgiveness of sin. We obtain forgiveness of sin may through Jesus Christ.² And, at the same time, we obtain spiritual life through Jesus Christ.³

Spiritual life is an *experience* just like spiritual death is an experience. The experience of moving from spiritual death to spiritual life is *striking*. When one experiences spiritual life after living a spiritual death, it is as is one had never really been alive before. It is for this reason that the Bible refers to the commencement of spiritual life as being “born again.”⁴

Forgiveness of sin and spiritual life (eternal life) is called salvation. It is called salvation because it saves us from something. It saves us from spiritual death. We become saved by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin.⁵ It is a free gift.⁶ We obtain this gift by

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

2. Ephesians 1:7,8 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”

3. John 11:26 “Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”

4. John 3:3 “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

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

6. Ephesians 2:8,9 “Fir by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God.”

means of a sincere prayer wherein one decides and tells God that he or she has decided to trust entirely in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin. Just use your own words. Simple.

But *experiencing* spiritual life is different. To experience spiritual life is to know God⁷ and knowing God occurs when we turn from sin. This is called repentance. Of course it is necessary to turn from sin in order to know God! It is impossible to know God and continue to sin.⁸ If anyone trusts in Christ and never knows God it is because that person never fully resolves to give up sin.

We may turn back to sin at times and then turn back to God. But this turning away and turning back is expected. It is the Christian life. Christian life is not a status; it is a progression. When relating to God, heart (sincerity) is more important than performance. God provides the performance and enables us to turn from sin, but He requires that we provide the heart. God does not relate well with double minded people.⁹

To the person who has not yet experienced these things, knowing God may appear to be a type of psychological phenomena that occurs to some people who simply need to believe in God and decide to do so. But this argument fails because God discloses Himself in no uncertain terms to those who seek Him sincerely. He discloses Himself in such a way as to obviate all doubt. Believing that God exists is certainly a start but it is not the goal.¹⁰ The goal is to know Him and He tells us how quite clearly.

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].¹¹

7. John 17:3 "This is eternal life that you may know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent."

8. John 1:6 "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie"

9. James 4:8 "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

10. James 2:19 "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."

11. John 14:21

And knowing God is when God is present in us:

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 [reside] with him.¹²

Each of these scriptures is about love and about keeping God's word and keeping His word means to stop committing sin (such as the sins of judgment and unforgiveness). The Bible is all about spiritual life (righteousness) and spiritual death (sin). It is all about obtaining forgiveness by trusting in Jesus Christ and turning from sin. And in the end it all comes down to whether one knows God or not. Going to church and talking a good line will not work. Actually knowing God is everything.

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!'¹³

What did Christ mean when He said "you workers of lawlessness?" He was referring to people who consistently commit sin (because sin is lawlessness). In the context of a marriage, you can't be a part of God's kingdom and continue to commit adultery or continue to judge your spouse or continue to refuse to forgive. Those things keep you *out*. Righteousness keeps you *in*.

It is all about love. Righteousness and love go hand in hand.

He who does not love Me does not keep My words.¹⁴

And how do we know that we actually know Him? Because He tells us spiritually:

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that
we are children of God...¹⁵

12. John 14:23

13. Matthew 7:22

14. John 14:24

15. Romans 8:16

We must look inside of ourselves for the presence of Christ:

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?^{16†}

Biblical Christianity is knowing God. It is not church-work, going to mass, eating the wafer, praying, kneeling, genuflecting, ecstatic speech, unknown languages, swooning, shaking or fainting or believing hard enough. Christianity is one thing and one thing alone. Christianity is knowing God and knowing God comes through reliance on Christ alone for the forgiveness of all sin and keeping His word. Knowing God is a spiritual love affair with Christ, and His love language is righteousness.

As in a human love affair, there is a cause and effect. Love, consideration, respect, attentiveness, kindness and patience are necessary expressions of love. If those expressions are not present, one questions whether love is present. Words alone do not suffice. Actions suffice. The same is true with Christ except the way that we express love to Him is to yield our heart to Him by committing to obey His commands.

With sincere obedience from the heart, one may live an entire lifetime filled with the peace of God. Knowing God brings a peace that surpasses all comprehension.¹⁷ 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 how to keep it.¹⁸

The Presence of God means the end of emptiness and meaninglessness, the end of confusion, the end of unending questions, the end of guilt, the end of self-doubt, the end of wandering, the end of wondering and the end of searching. The Presence of God is to know God and to know God is to experience eternal life *right now*, in this life.

16. Second Corinthians 13:5 † Many read these verses for years and never see them. The way to understand these verses is to first understand that there is no mystery here. They mean exactly what they say.

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

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

And this is eternal life that they may know You,
the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You
have sent.¹⁹



Salvation and Knowing God Compared

SALVATION AND KNOWING GOD ARE
DIFFERENT

Some verses that relate to salvation may appear to contract verses that relate to knowing God.

For instance, Romans 3:23 and others tell us that we have been given righteousness through faith in Christ and that we have been forgiven of all sin.¹ But Matthew 6:14 tells us that God will not forgive us unless we forgive others.² Romans 8:38³ tells us that we can never lose our salvation and therefore never condemned or judged for our sin. But Matthew 7:1⁴ tells us that God will judge us in the same way that we judge others. Although these verses may appear to be contradictory, a closer look shows that they are not because they address two different things. The first group applies to eternal salvation and the second group applies to relating to God (knowing God) in this life.

Eternal salvation is not contingent upon our righteousness. It is a gift that God gives us in spite of our unrighteousness.⁵ It is a gift because it has to be a gift because the penalty for sin is eternal death⁶ and we have all sinned.⁷ Therefore we cannot pay what is due for our own sin and live. Christ had to do it for us. Christ died in our place

1. Romans 3:23 “And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” Colossians 1:13, 14 “He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Ephesians 1:7 “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”

2. Matthew 6:14 “For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their transgressions, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

3. Romans 8:38 “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord...”

4. Matthew 7:1 “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. Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”

6. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.” See *Fate of Unbelievers* for a list of the 50 scriptures that teach eternal death as the ultimate consequence for sin.

7. Romans 3:23 “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

and paid our penalty. Christ was later resurrected because His death paid for the very sins (our sins) for which He died and He Himself was sinless.⁸

On the other hand knowing God is not a gift. It cannot be a gift because it is a relationship and relationships are dynamic and depend upon the acts of each party to the relationship. If either party to a relationship commits relational sin, the relationship can be destroyed. Keeping His commandments is a prerequisite to knowing Him:

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.⁹

Therefore in order to relate to God, we must voluntarily avoid sin. Our relationship with God is contingent upon us avoiding sin. The reason for this obvious. He paid the death penalty for our sin for us and the entire world.¹⁰ What good would that payment be if we accept His gift and then continue to commit the same sins for which He died? It would be a mockery of the cross.

Therefore, knowing God is not a gift. It is a relationship.

Here is a comparison between some of the scriptures that relate to salvation and others that relate to knowing God.

Eternal Salvation

Acts 16:30 “**Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”

John 5:24 “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life**”

Romans 8:38 “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities...**nor any other created thing** [including us] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”

Knowing God

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

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.

John 17:3 “This is eternal life **that they may know You and Jesus Christ** whom You have sent.”

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

9. John 14:21

10. First John 2:2 “He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

Eternal Salvation

Ephesians 2:8,9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith...it is **the gift of God**

Ephesians 1:7 “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and **remembers your sins no more ...**”

Ephesians 8:12 “For **I will forgive their wickedness** and will remember their sins no more.”

First John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**”

Psalms 103:3 “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all His kind deeds—**He who forgives all your iniquities**”

Psalms 103:12 “**As far as the east is from the west**, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Hebrews 8:12 ““For I will **forgive their wickedness** and will remember their sins no more.”

Isaiah 43:25 “I, even I, am he **who blots out your transgressions**, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that **everyone who believes in Him** shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Acts 16:31 “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**, you and your household.”

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Knowing God

Matthew 7:1 “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.**”

Matthew 6:14 “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, **neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**”

Matthew 12:7 “**I desire compassion**, not a sacrifice.” (Christ quoting Hosea 6:6)

Mark 11:25 “And when you stand praying, **if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them**, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Matthew 18:21 ““Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but **seventy-seven times.**’”

Luke 6:37 “**Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**”

Matthew 5:22 “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be **subject to judgment.**”

Matthew 7:22, 23 “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘**I never knew you**; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!’

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

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Romans 8:16 “**The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit** that we are children of God...”

Psalms 40:16 “Let **those who love Thy salvation** say continually, “The Lord be magnified.”

Psalms 51:10, 11 “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. **Do not cast me away from Your presence**, and do not take

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Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation. And sustain me with a willing spirit.”

Matthew 12:7 “I desire compassion, not a sacrifice.” (quoting Hosea 6:6)

First John 1:5 “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

John 11:10 “If anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

Scriptures that teach us how to relate to know God are very much different from the scriptures that teach us salvation. Salvation scriptures are generally black and white promises, but scriptures that tell us how to know God are relational and dependent upon our own righteousness (behavior) and rate of growth in Christ.

By giving us the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God places us in a world where we can choose either good or evil (because with the knowledge of good and evil we know what good and evil are), a world where the choice to do right may not be rewarded as much as the choice to do wrong. He gives us a world of free choice where the realm of men, the physical world, and the Kingdom of God, are both present and superimposed upon one another.^{1†}

1. Luke 17:20, 21 “When asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God will not come with observable signs. Nor will people say, ‘Look, here it is,’ or ‘There it is.’ For you see, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” † The Kingdom of God exists now, in this life. The Kingdom of God is to know God and to experience His eternal life now, in our mortal life. John 17:3 “This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ who You have sent.”

Christ delivers us from the kingdom of man (darkness) and transferred us to the kingdom of Christ.² The coin of the Kingdom of man is gold and power. The coin of the Kingdom of God is righteousness.

Sin (evil) creates a love for darkness.³ So to the extent that a love for darkness prevents us from turning to Christ, our choices in life will forge our eternal destiny. Christ is the light of the world.⁴ But men loved darkness rather than light. Thus, what we do determines what we love; and what we love determines what we choose; and what we choose (whether Christ or not) determines our present and eternal destiny. Righteousness is the whole ball of wax.

We find both New Testament and Old Testament scriptures related to knowing God. So, it is not just a New Testament experience but an Old Testament experience as well. God has been making Himself known to many, but not all, since the creation.

To know God is to live in the Kingdom of God and experience Christ's gift of eternal life in the here and now:

And this is eternal life, that they may know
You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom
You have sent.⁵



2. Colossians 1:13 "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,"

3. John 13:19 "And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil."

4. John 8:12 ""I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

5. John 17:3

The Original Sin

WHAT WAS THE FALL OF MAN

What the original sin actually was is pivotal. If the original sin was nothing more than disobedience, then we are missing the point of Genesis 2 and 3.

The original sin was not just disobedience. The original sin was the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. This one sin affected all of mankind because Adam and Eve passed on the knowledge of good and evil to their progeny.

The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not merely an element of the fall. It *was* the fall. The entire human race did not fall in to sin and death simply because two people disobeyed God on one occasion thousands of years ago. The human race fell into sin because of what that disobedience *was*. The result was acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil for all of humanity.

This concept is similar to the person who disobeys a traffic law and causes a wreck. It is true that the wreck resulted from disobedience, but the disobedience itself is not the tragedy. The tragedy is the wreck.

SPIRITUAL DEATH OF ADAM AND EVE

The doctrine of original sin as currently understood in many of the evangelical churches omits the concept of the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil and stresses the concept of death. Physical death is said to be the result of the fall because God had warned Adam and Eve that they would die on the very day that they ate the fruit.

But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.¹

1. Genesis 2:17

But, in fact, they did not die on the day that they ate the fruit. They lived and they later encountered God in the garden and cast them out of the garden. Adam lived for another 930 years before he finally died physically.² So, Adam did not die on the day that he ate the fruit—far from it. So what is the meaning of the passage?

In the original Hebrew, the word that is translated “surely” has the same meaning as in English.³ It intensifies the clarity and strength of the word “die.” The passage means that they will *most certainly die* on the day that they ate the fruit and there will be no question about it. As stated by one scholarly source on the meaning of the passage in Hebrew:

Why then did God prohibit man from eating
of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
with the threat that as soon as he ate thereof, he
would surely die?⁴

Since Adam and Eve did not die physically die as soon as they ate the fruit, the passage could not be referring to physical death. Therefore the passage must refer to spiritual death. This reading is precisely in line with the effect of the fruit. The effect of the fruit was to impart the knowledge of good and evil to Adam and Eve, but this knowledge cannot be physical because it was passed on to their progeny. The knowledge itself is spiritual.

The knowledge of good and evil resulted in the spiritual death of Adam and Eve. Spiritual death is no stranger to the Bible. Indeed, the Bible is all about spiritual life and spiritual death:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,
in which you used to walk when you con-
formed to the ways of this world and of the rul-
er of the power of the air, the spirit who is now
at work in the sons of disobedience.⁵

2 . Genesis 5:5 “Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.”

3 . See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Eerdmans, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1975), vol. 1, page 85

4 . C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Eerdmans, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1975), vol. 1, page 85, taking the position that the fruit itself was not poisonous.

5. Ephesians 2:1

The warning that they would die if they ate the fruit was not a warning of physical death. It was a warning of spiritual death.

Consider God's formal judgment on Adam and Eve for their sin of eating the fruit. God's judgment contains no mention of physical death. Physical death had nothing to do with it what happened as a result of eating the fruit.

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband and he shall rule over you."⁶

God then cursed Adam for eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil:

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree...

Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.⁷

The reference to Adam "returning to the ground" is not part of the curse, it is a statement of established fact. There are at least three reasons why this is true. 1) "you are dust" is a statement of present fact. Adam did not become dust; he was dust because He was created from dust. 2) Eve was not cursed in this way. God did not declare her to be dust. The point being that if physical death was the meaning of God's warning and "to dust you shall return" was its implementation, then the pronouncement would have been made against Eve as well. But it was not. It was limited to Adam because it was not the result of his disobedience. It was a statement of established fact.

6. Genesis 3:16

7. Genesis 3:17-19

3) The third reason why physical death and becoming dust and dying was not part of the curse is because Adam and Eve were destined to die physically whether they ate the fruit or not. Adam and Eve could not have avoided their inevitable physical death unless they had eaten from the tree of life, which was also in the garden. But God was careful not to permit that to occur. Indeed, He banished them from the garden for the express purpose of preventing them from eating from the tree of life.

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out with his hand, and take fruit also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” — Therefore the LORD God sent him out of the Garden of Eden...He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.⁸

The only part that death plays in Genesis 2 and 3 is that *spiritual* death occurs immediately when Adam and Eve ate the fruit, exactly as God had warned them.

The argument supporting the contention that physical death was the result of Adam and Eve did has to explain why Adam did not die physically until 930 years later. That explanation is that when God said that Adam would most certainly die on that very day he did die physically on that very day—just 930 years later. This conclusion is simply not logical and it is error.

Arguments of this nature are instances of doctrines effectively changing scripture in order to accommodate themselves. However, the opposite should be the case. Doctrine should not dictate what scripture teaches no matter how well established it may be. Scripture should dictate what doctrine teaches.

Unfortunately, the error is not limited to ignoring Genesis 2:17, it is also expanded to the argument that the physical death of man occurs because all of humanity is guilty of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. These errors result in the true significance of the fall being, at best, misunderstood and, at worst, simply ignored.

8. Genesis 3:22 “

IMPUTED SIN

The doctrine of imputed sin teaches that the guilt of Adam and Eve is imputed to us and God will punish us for what Adam and Eve did. This doctrine focuses on the disobedience itself, rather than the tragedy that resulted from the disobedience. This doctrine is plain error because there is no imputed guilt in scripture. Scripture provides that each person is responsible for his own guilt, not the guilt of someone else.

Scripture tells us that through Adam, death spread to all men because *all sinned* not because Adam and Eve had sinned. Scripture simply does not say that death spread to all men because Adam and Eve sinned. It says that death spread through Adam because *all sinned*.

Just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world and death through sin and so death spread to all men because all sinned.⁹

And how did sin enter into the world? Through the knowledge of good and evil. The knowledge of good and evil is essential for sin because in order to be guilty of sin, we must know that it is sin.

I was once alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died.¹⁰

Those who cannot perceive sin cannot commit it. We know this because without the law (the perception of sin), there is no sin.

For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.^{11†}

Similarly, In Romans 5:12, we learn that the result of Adam's sin was condemnation *to* all mankind, not condemnation *of* all mankind.

9. Romans 5:12

10. Romans 7:9

11 . Romans 5:15 † Paul was addressing the Torah, not Genesis. But the concept still applies. If there is no knowledge of good and evil, then there can be no sin. Also, all of the categories of sin in Revelation 21:8 are knowing and willful acts.

So then, as through one offense the result was condemnation to all mankind so also through one act of righteousness the result was justification of life to all mankind. ^{12†}

And in the following verse, we learn that the disobedience of Adam caused “the many” (but not all men) to be *made* sinners. It does not say that the disobedience of Adam caused the many to *be* sinners. And indeed, as described in this book, that is exactly what occurred.

Without the knowledge of good and evil, sin is not possible because one must know something is wrong before one can be guilty of doing it. And with the knowledge of good and evil, man can sin and shift the blame or deny sin altogether.

For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One, the many will be made righteous. ^{13†}

Romans 5:12 compares the act of Adam (eating the fruit) to the act of Christ (the cross). The act of Adam and Eve resulted in condemnation to all mankind (because all sinned) and the act of Christ by paying for our sins of all on the cross resulted in justification of

12. Romans 5:18 † The Greek reads literally, “So then as by one offense [it was] towards [εἰς] all men to condemnation through so also by one accomplished righteousness towards [εἰς] all men to [εἰς] justification of life.” *The Englishman’s Greek New Testament together with An Interlinear Literal Translation and Authorized Version of 1611* (Bagster & Sons, London 1877) reprinted Lowe and Brydone, London. See also the Nestle text, “So therefore as through one offence to [εἰς] all men to [εἰς] condemnation so also through one righteous act to all men to [εἰς] justification of life” Marshall, The Reverend Alfred, D.Litt., *The Interlinear Greek - English New Testament* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan) 1958. The preposition is εἰς which means “entrance into, to, towards, for, among” or “to denote purpose” or “to denote reference to a person or thing” Bauer Arndt & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (University of Chicago Press, 1958) s.v. εἰς. The Greek word εἰς in this verse means “in reference to” or more literally “toward.” The passage is saying that the sin of Adam is directed toward or affects all of mankind. It is not saying all of mankind sinned the sin of Adam.

13. Romans 5:19 † Here we find that many, but not all, were made sinners as a result of the sin of Adam. And through Christ many, but not all, will be made righteous. Christ’s death was sufficient for the salvation of all of mankind, but it was effective only to those who choose to receive it.

life to all.^{14†} The use of “to” is the same in both instances.^{15†} Christ’s sacrifice did not result in the justification of life (eternal life) **of** all mankind because some reject it and are cast into the lake of fire at the final judgment.¹⁶ And similarly, Adam’s sin did not result in condemnation **of** all mankind because infants and the insane cannot sin. Therefore death spread to all men *because all sinned* exactly as Romans 5:12 says, not because Adam sinned.

What Adam passed to his progeny was the *effect* of the fruit and that effect was to result in sin for all men because all sinned.¹⁷ The fruit was the entrée of sin into man and hence into the world. What we inherit is the knowledge of good and evil which is irreversibly wedded to our imperfection and hence our inevitable downfall. We inherited the ability to sin from Adam, but we did not inherit Adam’s guilt for Adam’s sin. We we must commit our own sin before we can be guilty of any sin.

Scripture clarifies this in the strongest of terms. All of Ezekiel 18 teaches this. In that chapter, God reiterates that there is no vicarious sin and no vicarious guilt. He is addressing the error of the Israelites who were teaching that the guilt of a father’s sin would be imposed upon the son in the same way that some teach that the guilt of Adam is imposed on us. Ezekiel 18 disavows this error and teaches that man is responsible only for what *he* does—not what someone else does.

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,
What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, “The fathers eat the sour grapes [the fathers sin] but the children’s teeth are set on edge [the children bear the guilt of the father’s sin].” As I live, declares the Lord God, you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.¹⁸

The person [the soul] that sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment

14. † This is the doctrine of unlimited atonement

15. †

16. See Revelation 21:8

17. Romans 5:12

18. Ezekiel 18:1-3

for his son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.^{19†}

According to the erroneous doctrine of imputed sin, no sin is necessary other than Adam's before God will throw someone into the lake of fire. Therefore, an unborn child who dies at the hand of an abortionist will be resurrected, judged guilty of Adam's sin and cast into the lake of fire and there be burned alive for the rest of eternity because Adam once sinned some 4000 years ago. Whereas, according to that erroneous doctrine, God will pardon the abortionist who killed the child if the abortionist comes to Christ. Thus the abortionist resides in heaven for the rest of eternity and the child that he killed resides in the flames of hell. Doctrines that reach conclusions that are so drastically unrealistic should be carefully scrutinized because God is just and God is holy and God is love. Doctrines that teach that He is effectively unjust, unholy and without love are error. God does not infants into a lake of fire.

Revelation 20:12 teaches that all people (all souls) who have rejected Christ will be judged based upon the deeds that *they* committed in life, not based upon the sin that Adam committed.

And I saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened...and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.²⁰

In Revelation 21:8 we see a category of sins for which sinners will be cast into the lake of fire. None of those categories include anyone who did not intend to commit sin. Nor do they include anyone who is either too young to commit sin or simply insane. Infants are not included in the category of those who will be cast into the lake of fire nor is the guilt of Adam.

19. Ezekiel 18:20 † This concept is repeated several times in Ezekiel 18.

20. Revelation 20:12

But the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murders and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire, which is the second death.²¹

John 3:19 tells us that the condemnation (judgment) is that “men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” not because Adam and Eve sinned.

The teaching that we bear the guilt of Adam impugns the character of God because it challenges not only the scriptures that relate to the final judgment but also because it challenges the very justice of God.²²

The error of imputed guilt is important because it directly affects the issues discussed in this book. The error of imputed guilt dilutes the meaning Genesis, which is the effect of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on us. The error diverts our attention away from true effect of the fall and points us toward a humanity that is so sin-sick that it is guilty of a sin that it never committed. This myopic view of the garden obscures the central issue, and the central issue is the true substance of the fall: the effect that the knowledge of good and evil has on us.



21. Revelation 21:8

22. See the Author's *Fate of Unbelievers*.

Sin Kills

FIFTEEN CENTURIES OF WARNINGS THAT SIN
KILLS

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 sin-
neth 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

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

Second 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

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

50 Scriptures Teaching that Sin Kills

Here are 50 scriptures teaching unequivocally that the inescapable result of sin is death—spiritual death in this life and eternal death in the next.

1. 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. Genesis 2:17
2. Knowest thou not since of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet, he shall perish for ever ..." Job 20:6,7
3. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:6
4. But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.
5. Why boasteth thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually. Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness... God shall likewise destroy thee for ever He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living.
6. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me ... For thou hast delivered my soul from death ... Psalm 56:11:13
7. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed forever. Psalm 92:7
8. For thou hast delivered my soul from death. Psalm 116:8

9. The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will He destroy. Psalm 145:20
10. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish. Proverbs 19:9
11. ... they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. Isaiah 1:28
12. 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. Ezekiel 18:4
13. 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? Ezekiel 33:11
14. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help...I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death... Hosea 13:9,13
15. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been. But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance... Obadiah 16
16. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.¹ Matthew 3:12 (Luke 3:17)
17. Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Matthew 7:13
18. Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both the soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

1. The Greek word for “burn up” in this passage is κατακαυσει, which means to destroy by burning or “burn up.” It is the same word used in Second Peter 3:10 denoting complete destruction. Neither the Greek word nor the English translation of it connotes eternal burning but instead means destruction by burning.

19. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned [consumed]² in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. Matthew 13:40

20. And Jesus said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:2

21. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. Luke 19:27

22. But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more... Luke 20:35,36

23. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.³ John 3:16

24. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever... John 6:50

25. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. Then the Jews said to Him, Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death. John 8:51, 52

26. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish John 10:28

27. Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. John 11:26

28. ...Deserving of death. Romans 1:32

2. See footnote for Matthew 3:12. The same Greek word is used.

3. Note the symmetry here: either life or death

29. Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. Romans 5:12

30. So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 5:21

31. Do you know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? Romans 6:16

32. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. Romans 6:21

33. The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

34. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. First Corinthians 1:18

35. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. First Corinthians 15:26

36. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' First Corinthians 15:54

37. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; Who delivered us from so great a death... Second Corinthians 1:9

38. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. Second Corinthians 2:16

39. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. Second Corinthians 7:10

40. ... but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, Who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. Second Timothy 1:10

41. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Second Thessalonians 2:9, 10

42. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Hebrews 2:9

43. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

44. Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death... James 5:20

45. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ... but these ... shall utterly perish in their own corruption; And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness ... Second Peter 2:9, 12-13

46. The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Second Peter 3:9

47. I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Revelation 1:18

48. 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. Revelation 2:11

49. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power ... Revelation 20:6

50. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. Revelation 21:8



Every reference to the eternal state of the unredeemed in the Bible refers to death. There is no scripture that refers to eternal torment for the unredeemed in the protestant Bible. There is only one scripture that mentions eternal torment and that is Revelation 20:10 which refers to the eternal fate of Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet. There is no direct support for the doctrine of eternal torment in the canon.



An Analysis of the Confrontation of Mole

Because Mole is sincere, this statement shows humility, not self-pity.
Proverbs 22:4 "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life."

Mole is crying. He is sincere; he is not using his injury as a platform to criticize.

Second Peter 2:1 "Put away all malice and all deceit"

Second Corinthians 1:12 Behave "with simplicity and godly sincerity"

"Oh dear!" is a purely emotional outburst. Mole has no need for anger or injurious words because he has not judged Ratty or condemned him—and without judgment there can be no anger. Mole has accepted Ratty exactly the way he is, but he is still free to express his feelings and should not hesitate to do so when necessary.

This is a statement of uncontested fact, not a criticism

Initially, Rat makes no response. Why? Because there is nothing to respond to. Mole has not criticized Ratty. Mole has done nothing but state an obvious fact and told Rat how that fact has affected him. He shared his feelings and said nothing else. No demands, no accusation, no correction and no criticism.

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out between the upheavals of his chest ... 'I know it's a - shabby, dingy little place,' **he sobbed forth** at last, brokenly: 'not like - your cozy quarters - or Toad's beautiful hall - or Badgers great house - but **it was my own little home** - and I was fond of it ... and when I called and **you would not listen**, Rat - and everything came back to me with a rush - and **I wanted it!** - **O dear, O dear!** - and you *wouldn't* turn back Ratty - and I had to leave it, though I was smelling it all the time. **I thought my heart would break.** We might have just gone and had one look at it, Ratty - only one look - it was close by - but you wouldn't turn back, Ratty, **you wouldn't turn back! O dear!**'

The Rat **stared straight in front of him, saying nothing**, only patting Mole gently on the shoulder. After a time he muttered gloomily, 'I see it all now! What a pig I have been! **A pig - that's me!** Just a pig - a plain pig.'

He shares his feelings. And because he is sincere and humble he has credibility and his feelings have impact.

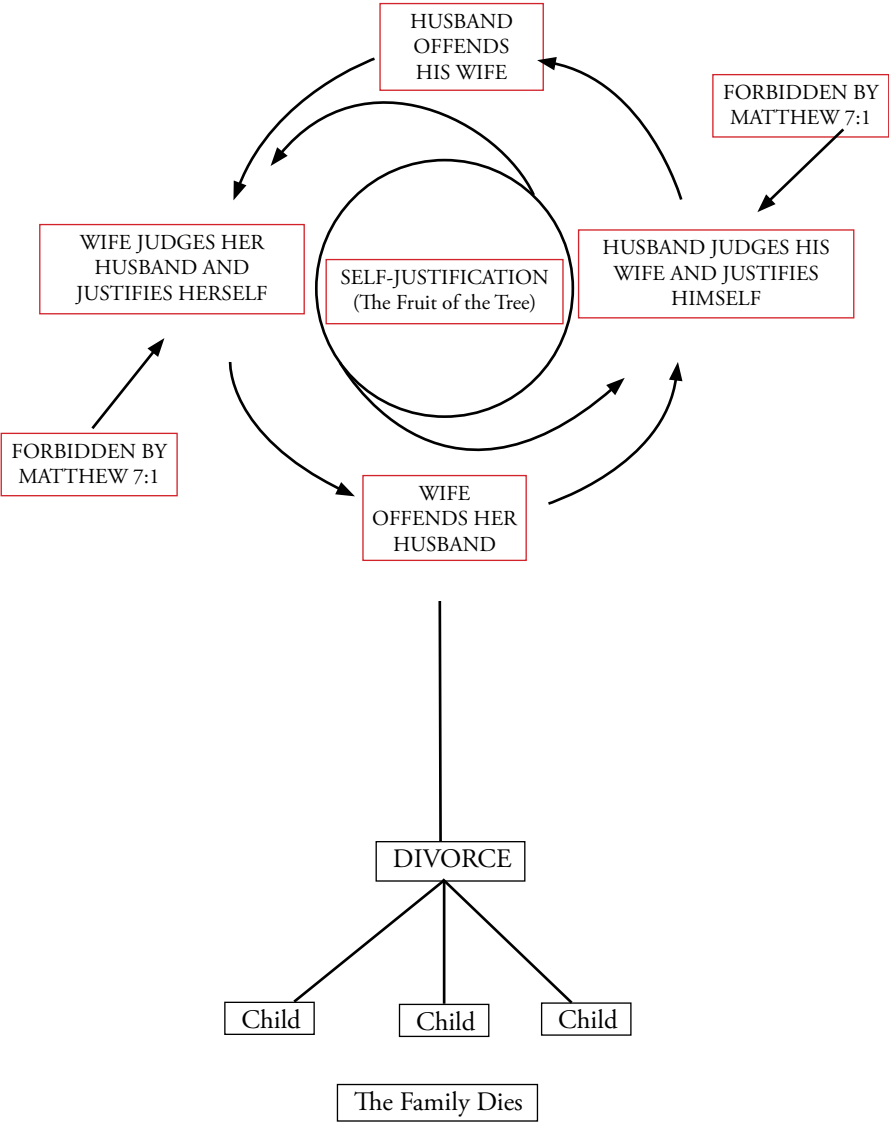
Sincerity and humility breed sincerity and humility. It is just a matter of time. Mole refuses to judge or criticize Rat, therefore he does not take offense to what Mole has said.

Ratty has no need to defend himself because Mole has not insulted him. Because he had not immediate need to defend himself, he examines himself instead and discovers his own weakness. He has the humility necessary to discover it and the strength of character to admit it.

Neither Mole nor Rat have engaged in self-justification. They have instead yielded to Christ's command never to judge. It is this absence of judgment and condemnation that renders these characters such a pleasure to read about.

Since Mole has not judged Rat, Ratty has no need to defend himself and is free to look at himself honestly and with humility.

Cycle of Judgment and Offense



What is Love?

LOVE IS AFFECTION

There are many different definitions of love but most of them don't really describe love. They describe the effects of love. For instance, some say, "Love is loyalty" or "Love is service" or "Love is sacrifice."

But no. Love is neither loyalty nor service nor sacrifice. Loyalty and service and sacrifice may well be the effects of love, but they are not love itself. The same is true for the other attributes of love that are described in First Corinthians 13:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous;
love does not brag and is not arrogant, does
not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own,
is not provoked, does not take into account
a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness,
but rejoices with the truth; bears all things,
believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...¹

These things are the *results* of love or the way love acts, but they are not love itself. Love itself is one thing and one thing alone. Love is *affection*. And it is the strength of this affection that causes the loyalty, and the service and the sacrifice.

Not all loves are the same. For instance, there is one kind of love for one's parents or one's children. There is another kind of love for one's lover and another kind of love for a friend. In biblical Greek there are 4 different kinds of loves. There is the love of family, the love of friends, the love of lovers and the love given by God. In this book we are concerned primarily with the love of lovers because it is romantic love that transforms marriages.

But if romantic love is to return, it must do so within the limitations established by scripture because love, all love, originates with God.² Romantic love returns to those who yield.

1. First Corinthians 13:4-8

2. First John 4:7 "love is from God"

The first three loves (the love of friends, of family and of lovers) are defined by the people who are in the relationship. Friends determine how close the friendship will be, family members determine how they relate within the context of the family and wise lovers carefully consider each step and the long term effects of their relationship.

However, when the romance becomes a scriptural marriage, they lose their right to decide for themselves how much they will accept each other. They can no longer circumscribe their relationship because in a scriptural marriage, scripture defines the boundaries. If the parties wish to enjoy the benefits of a scriptural marriage, they must yield to the dictates of scripture as it relates to how they will relate to one another.

The reason for this is that scripture is establishing not only a beautiful relationship, but also a family where children and others as well will be relying on the solidarity and longevity of that relationship. Therefore, in the biblical marriage the parties are required to accept each other *totally*, so much so that the two become one flesh.³

The parties to the biblical marriage may not determine for themselves the amount of acceptance that they will extend to the other spouse and still retain the benefits of a biblical marriage. They must permit scripture to work in its own way if the miracle is to occur. Miracles that are afforded to biblical marriages do not occur because the spouses are religious or because they can quote scripture. Miracles occur in marriage because the marriage is biblical. And the marriage is biblical when the spouses are committed to scripture and yield to it.

Scripture is telling us how to preserve one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, treasure of all life—deep human love. It is something that God gives us to nurture and preserve.

Then scripture tells us precisely how.



3. Mark 10:8 “And the two shall become one flesh”; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh”