

Endless Love

LOVE THAT NEVER DIES



By Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

ENDLESS LOVE

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"Love never fails"

First Corinthians 13:8

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"Buy the Truth and sell it not."

Proverbs 23:23

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For Mary, whose help and encouragement has been invaluable.



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Forward

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



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

Criticism and unforgiveness kill relationships; they kill marriages and they kill families. To prevent it or reverse their effect, one must understand how they do what they do and how to stop them.

The remedy to the loveless marriage presented in this book is generally opposed to the entire body of all secular and most Christian marital counseling. To the minds of many this book and its remedy is radical and quite impossible because the remedy that it proposes is a miracle. But the author offers no apology and suggests that the proof of the scriptural truths and the resulting miracle set forth herein are demonstrated by the result that is available to anyone willing to make the commitment.

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

Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.
Dallas, Texas 2020

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

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Reading the Book

All the chapters in the book contain the contents of the book in Blue Text on the left, as shown on this page. Click on any chapter to go there instantly. There is a small red dot in the margin in every chapter that shows you where you are.

† indicates a comment on the text of a scripture

◇ Indicates a comment on the accuracy of scripture

↻ indicates the end of a chapter.

↻ indicates the end of sub-chapter.

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See the author's site on intelligent design at CREATIONDESIGN.ORG

Generic pronouns are used as follows: The pronoun "he" can mean the male or either male or female depending on the context. The pronoun "her" is reserved exclusively for the female.

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Chapter 1

Love is the Key

What is love? We can't create it. We can't fake it. We can hardly get rid of it when we don't want it and sometimes it comes sweeping into life trailing its magnificent ecstasy and enraptures the very essence of who we are. Love is a gentle master but then, sometimes it simply leaves. Why?

It can begin with strength enough to perpetuate a dynasty and inspire lifelong marriage vows. But then it can die like a motherless puppy whimpering in the night. What irony it is that God would create such beauty and lead us to stake our future and our children upon it only to see it dissolve before its time.

We have all seen its demise at one time or another. The burden of years and family and struggle weigh life down. And love fights for breath as it is assaulted by repeated slights, old memories and words that are no longer spoken. Love dies when the forbidden reality of "I just don't care anymore" walks, like a specter, into the home.

How can we unwind a thousand pains and sins and pull back sincere affection from the night when we could not create it in the first place?

It has been said that God is love. So God, if He is there, must have a lot to do with love. But God can be distant when needed most, and resurrecting a dead love or saving a dying one would take a true miracle. But that miracle exists and this book is about how to get it.

This is a book about a miracle that rescues families from the flames of divorce, restores the original spark and saves children from the death of trust. It is about a miracle that brings back real and actual passionate human love from the grip of emotional death.

This book is not about a new method of relating, marital counseling, communication skills or better sex, because method is not the key. Love is the key, the only key. This book is about love and how to get it back.

But first, we must ask "What is love?" That is an intriguing question because there are four of them.



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Chapter 2

The Four Loves

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

Before we consider the four loves, we should clarify that love is really only *one thing*. It is affection. It may be the love of a friend or the love of a lover. But affection is all that it really is.

The affection called love has many expressions. But expressions of love are the result of love, not love itself. Love itself is affection. Love creates the desire to give, to persevere, to serve or to benefit, but these things are not love. Love is expressed by accepting others, but love itself is not acceptance. Love is affection pure and simple and that affection is the inspiration and the reason behind each of love's expressions. Without love, each of those expressions is empty, driven by a duty, a habit or an agenda.

The presence of love makes an immense difference in life because when we love, things like kindness, acceptance and self-sacrifice and other virtues flow naturally and out of love. They become expressions of who we are. We do them because we want to, not because we have to. There is no duty in love; only expression. Duty and commitment give substance and continuity to love. They give it strength. They enhance it when love is fleeting and they support it when love is assaulted. And when love is present, they are love's expressions.

So, love was created to be expressed, to be given. When we understand this, we begin to grasp a deeper understanding of who God is because God is love.¹

When love comes to us, it changes us from the inside because it changes what we want to do. What a massive difference that makes! That which would be a duty becomes an opportunity. That which is a social obligation becomes a sincere expression of affection and that which would have been an obligatory courtesy becomes a mutual expression of grace and acceptance. Love is transforming.

Love is like a song that transfixes an audience with the sheer beauty of its sound. To hear the song is wonderful. But to be the singer who sings the song is an experience to be desired beyond all measure.

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

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The Creator is the singer, and He sings the song of songs. He is love² and He sings to us of Himself. And in doing so He empowers us to sing His song to others.

On the outside, love may not appear to make much of a difference because we may do the same things we normally do just because we are supposed to do them. But on the inside, love makes duty a pleasure. Love makes life a pleasure.

But exactly what is the affection called love?

The Four Loves

There are four different loves in biblical Greek (the language of the Bible) and each one is different. But they are all translated "love" or "charity" in English Bibles. So, when the English reader reads "love," he does not know to which love the text is referring. This lumping together dilutes the meaning because the four loves are all different.

The first of the four loves is the love of family. The Greek word for the love of family is *στοργή*, or "storgé" ("store gay"). Storgé is the natural love of parents for children and children for parents and siblings and other family members.

The second love is the love of friends. The Greek word for the love of friends is *φιλία*, or "philéa" (fill ay' ah) The name "Philadelphia" comes from the Greek word for the love of friends. It means the "City of Brotherly Love."

The third love is the love of lovers. The Greek word for this love is *έρως* or "eros." Eros is romantic love. Eros may or may not be expressed by physical intimacy. Eros is, of course, starkly different from the other two loves. A mother may tell a son "I love you," but when his bride whispers the same words to her husband the meaning is entirely different. Eros is the "chemistry" between lovers.

The Creator gives each of these loves to everyone. They are all beautiful but they are all human. One does not have to live long before discovering the frailty of humanity and its loves.

But there is a fourth love and the fourth love is different from the other three. Each of the other loves is defined by its object (the one who is loved) and the type of affection that results from that relation-

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

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ship. But the fourth love is different. The fourth love is not defined by the one who is loved and it is not limited to any particular relationship or person. The fourth love is love, period.

The fourth love is called ἀγάπη or “agápe” (“ah-gop’ ay”). Agápe is not bound by the limitations of humanity because agápe is supernatural. We know that agápe is supernatural because God is supernatural³ and God is agápe:

...God is Love [agápe]^{4†}

Therefore, agápe comes from God:

ἀγάπη [agápe] ἐκ [from, from out of] τοῦ θεοῦ
[God] ἐστίν [is]⁵

Agápe is affection, just like the other three loves, but because agápe is supernatural, it is an affection that is not limited by human failings.

Scripture gives us a very clear statement of the scope of agápe by telling us how agápe is expressed. That statement is found in First Corinthians 13. Every time that First Corinthians 13 says “love” or “charity” (KJV) in English, it is a translation of the Greek word “agápe”⁶ There is no other word for love in First Corinthians 13 except for agápe. So, all of First Corinthians 13 is about a supernatural love. That is the reason why we can never comply with all the conditions described First Corinthians 13.

[Agápe] is patient, agápe keeps no record of wrongs...it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, agápe never fails.⁷

3. John 4:24 “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship

Him in spirit and truth.”

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

5. First John 4:7

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

7. First Corinthians 13:4-8

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For instance, it is impossible for most of us to never take a wrong suffered into account, never seek one's own benefit, never be provoked (never take offense), always being patient and kind, never argue (being defensive), never be selfish, never "remember" a wrong suffered and endure all things. Only God can love like that.

There are no conditions attached to agápe. It is not a love "because" of something nor is it not a love "if" anything. It is love "period." Agápe keeps no records of wrongs and it bears all things. It is, by sheer definition, total acceptance no matter what. Agápe loves in spite of all sin and all fault. To agápe someone means to remove all conditions attached to acceptance of and affection toward that person—even if that person is engaged in grievous sin. Agápe loves the unlovable.

Agápe is *powerful*. Agápe is the supernatural love that took Jesus Christ to the cross as a *willing sacrifice*⁸ to die for the ungodly.^{9†} Christ "agáped" the Roman soldiers as they were killing Him.¹⁰ To agápe someone includes accepting that person just as Christ loved us—and just as He loves the entire world.¹¹ He commands us to accept and to love (to agápe) others with that same love and acceptance.¹²

Contentment in life depends largely on how much we can do that.

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

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

10. Luke 23:34 "Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves."

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

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

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Although scripture teaches that we are to “agápe one another” and to agápe our enemies,¹³ that does not mean that we must be close friends with everyone. Agápe and relationships are not the same thing.

When Scripture tells us to agápe, it is telling us that we are to be accepting of everyone within the scope of whatever the relationship happens to be. Agápe means that we should agápe the man on the street who is asking for money but it does not mean that we must invite him to dinner. It does mean, however, that we should help him buy him a meal if he is hungry.

Scripture permits each person to set his own boundaries in relationships. For instance, in a friendship, each friend draws a circle that defines the limits of the friendship that he or she desires. One friend may want a closer relationship and therefore draws the circle large. But the other may draw a smaller circle because he or she may not want a close relationship or perhaps he simply may not have the time for it. So the circles of the two friends are not necessarily the same size. The circle that governs is always the smaller circle because scripture does not require anyone to enter into a relationship that is either unwise or undesired. Each friend should accept this and do so with agápe—and without resentment.

Healthy friendships are always defined by the lowest common denominator, the smaller circle. But within that circle, agápe must freely flow.¹⁴ We can limit the boundaries of the circle, but we cannot scripturally limit the love that is inside it.

This applies to all human relationships except for marriage.

The Circle of Marriage

The circle of the scriptural marriage is different. In the scriptural marriage, the parties do not draw their own circles. In a scriptural marriage, scripture draws the circle. The scriptural marriage circle includes everything and everything means both the good and the bad. Nothing is excluded. In a marriage, both circles are the same because in the scriptural marriage, the husband and the wife become one person:

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

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

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But from the beginning, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.¹⁵†

In the scriptural marriage, the spouses are commanded to agápe one another and to accept one another unconditionally no matter what. This means that we accept our spouse in spite of all sin, all insults and all offenses because this is what agápe is.

Although, we accept our spouse unconditionally, that does not mean that we assent to or accept his or her sin. We are to accept the person of our spouse in spite of their sin. But sin is sin and sin is never to be accepted or agreed to. But where sin affects the marital relationship, we are to continue to accept the spouse in spite of the sin but that does not mean that we should not confront.¹⁶ The only other alternative to serious and continuing marital sin is a scriptural divorce.¹⁷†

15. Mark 10:6-8 † Within the marriage circle there are different functions and different responsibilities but all of these are exercised with the understanding—the starting point—that the two are one person. A mutual orientation, outlook and understanding of oneness is where an excellent marriage begins.

16. See Chapter 7

17. †The Bible appears to specifically authorize a divorce under the limited circumstances of adultery (Matthew 5:31, 32) and abandonment (First Corinthians 7:15). Beyond that, there is no specific scriptural authorization for divorce. However, a spouse who introduces things like child abuse, criminal enterprise, serious threats or assault into the home has effectively destroyed the marital covenant. Things of that nature so far exceed the scope of all scriptural teaching on marriage that it is not necessary enumerate them as justifications for divorce. A divorce under those circumstances is scriptural. Although the New Testament was not intended be an exclusive list of statutory reasons for a scriptural divorce, it was intended to set the bar high, very high. It is certainly true that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), but He hates child abuse even more. And it may well be that in God's eyes wife beating is worse than abandonment.

When a scriptural divorce occurs, each spouse is free to remarry. In the King James version, Matthew 5:32b is translated "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." This is a mis-translation. The American Standard Versions properly translates it as "whosoever shall marry her that is put away commits adultery." The Greek word translated "divorce" in the King James does not mean divorce; it means "put away" and "put away" is not the same as divorce. To "put away" in biblical times referred to a who forces his

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This is the primary reason why marriage, rather than simply living together is so very important. Without a biblical commitment, either party can draw whatever circle they prefer and what God intended to be a life-long stability rests upon nothing more than that the current preference of the other party. The profound emotional blow that follows a betrayal need be experienced only once before one fully understands why God did not create a marriage to rest solely upon the uncommitted good graces of ones partner. Guard your heart.¹⁸

The scriptural marriage has been carefully defined to include commitment in order to retain stability and peace in the most difficult of circumstances. But even total commitment is less than satisfactory because total commitment can only keep the marriage together. It takes love to make it wonderful.

But love dies. We all know that. But can love be made to survive the trials of marriage and family? The answer is simple—and biblical. Intimate, deep and passionate human love survives when eros acquires the continuity and the strength of agape.



wife to leave the home. A wife who had been put away was still married and she remained married until the husband gave her a "Bill of Divorcement." So, put away" in today's world is when one party leaves, but has not yet obtained a divorce.

Hence the American Standard translation is correct. Matthew 5:31b means that if the spouse who was living separately (but not divorced) is not free to remarry. So anyone who marries or engages in sexual intercourse with her or him commits adultery because the prior marriage is still valid. The reason why the scripture refers to the *woman* who was put away is because it was generally the man who did the putting away in biblical times because the home was inherited or owned by the male. Scripture is always consistent and the same Greek words are used in the companion verses (Matthew 19:9, Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18). A woman who leaves her husband has put herself away. Therefore the man or woman who has been divorced is free to remarry and the new spouse will not be committing adultery.

18. Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." NIV

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Chapter 3

Loves Merge

LOVES MERGE AND ENHANCE EACH OTHER

Loves merge. They enhance each other.

We may love a cousin or a sister or brother with both the love of family and the love of friends. When *storge*¹ merges with *philéa*, the structure of the familial bond merges with the camaraderie of friendship and the bond is stronger. The two siblings become bonded by two loves rather than one and the relationship takes on both the flexibility of friendship as well as the stability of family.

The same is true for romantic love. *Eros* merges with other loves as well. And every lover knows that *eros* needs more than just chemistry; lovers should be best friends as well as lovers. When powerful *eros* merges with *philéa*, it acquires an overlay of easy freedom and the two loves merge into one—one love with the character of both.

When the lovers marry, they have all three. They are friends; they are family and they are lovers all at once and each one loves the other with all three loves. They love with the whimsy of carefree friendship, with the structure of a permanent familial bond and the power of *eros*. Like metals melting together, *eros* lends its fire to the other two and the three merge into a easy warmth. If more than one love is present the loves will always merge. We have all experienced this to one extent or another.

Agápe is as much of a love as *eros* and *agápe* merges just like the other loves and perhaps better because *agápe* is not defined by its object. When *agápe* merges with another love the two become one with the character of both. But rather than instilling the freedom of friendship or the fire of *eros*, *agápe* imparts a supernatural power. Unlike the other three, there is neither flickering nor failing with *agápe*. *Agápe* is constant. It bears all things, believes all things and it never fails.¹ It never takes offense. It bears all of the imperfections of a spouse and does not bow its head when confronted with disappointment. So, to the extent that *agápe* is present, the human loves take on the strength and continuity that would otherwise never exist.

Agápe is like a stem cell. It grows into whatever love to which it is attached. When *agápe* is paired with the love of friends, it transforms *philéa* into a bond of friendship where there is no criticism, no

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

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resentment, no judgment, no impediment to acceptance and provides an environment where fidelity and discretion flourish, and wisdom and sound advice are the norm. This was the love that Christ was speaking of when He told His disciples to agápe one another. People who have true access to agápe are people who are easy to know because they are extremely accepting.

When agápe is paired with the love of family, it creates a foundation of certainty where history, baggage, politics and religion do not cause divisions.

When agápe pairs with the love of lovers it creates a love that is both physical and spiritual at the same time. Fickle eros becomes an oak in the presence of agápe. Eros is transformed into a passion that never fails, a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”²

The merging of agápe into a marriage is everything. Because it is love, not method, that forms the basis for a strong marriage. When love is strong, the marriage is strong and agápe makes the other loves strong.

The couples who have agápe love with four loves all at once. They live in continual peace and in love’s unending warmth. Their secret is that they accept one another not because they can justify a slight or forgive a failure or because the other spouse may deserve another chance but because God commands unconditional acceptance and He provides agápe as the means to accomplish it. The acceptance of an erring spouse is not based upon the performance of the spouse, but upon obedience to the Creator.

Where Does Agape Come From?

Agápe comes from God. We know that agápe comes from God because God *is* agápe.³ Therefore, we have to go to God to get agápe. Agápe comes from the presence of God.

The Bible tells us in plain language how to acquire God's agápe.

This is what it says:

2. First Corinthians 13:7
3. First John 4:8 "God is agápe"

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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.⁴

These words mean exactly what they say. They say and they mean that Jesus Christ will *disclose* Himself to us. He will make Himself known to us (We can know Him). To know Him, we must follow his commandments because following His commandments is how we agápe God. And those who agápe Him will be loved by Him and He will disclose Himself to them. It all revolves around love; God's love-language is obedience.

This scripture is magnificent in its simplicity because to see if it is true, *all we have to do is try it*.⁵

Turning from sin is the key to knowing God and knowing God is the key to agápe because God is agápe.⁶ When God with His agápe is present in a relationship, no one wants to sin. No one wants to insult or offend. No one wants to engage in any inappropriate anything and even if it happens (and it will), the other spouse will not take offense. God's presence changes what we *want* to do. He changes what we are and He changes what we love. He gives us a song and shows us the pleasure of singing it. It is a song about kindness, a symphony of consideration, fidelity and responsibility, a song about love and sacrifice and forgiveness and acceptance. It is a song about freedom because unconditional acceptance bestows *freedom* upon the beloved by giving the certainty of knowing that he or she will always be accepted and always loved no matter what—with all the mistakes, failures, shortcomings and all the rest. And it bestows freedom on the lover because it unburdens the lover of all condemnation and unforgiveness. In God's sight every slight or insult is an opportunity for the offended lover to give freedom and peace to the very one who has insulted him and to strengthen his own righteousness. Forgiveness is spiritual strength and spiritual strength is always experienced in internal equanimity and peace. No matter how you cut it, righteousness always wins. If you are not insulted, you win. If you are insulted, you win. And the larger the insult, the greater the opportunity to win.

4. John 14:21 (the speaker is Jesus Christ). Also see John 14:23 and Second Peter 1:3.

5. Knowing God is discussed extensively in Chapter 2 of this book. Knowing God is the key to it all.

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

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

Like the miracle of the water changed into wine,⁷ human love becomes transformed in the presence agápe because the presence of agápe is the presence of Christ.⁸ Agápe is a massive reservoir of love that is never exhausted.⁹ Agápe is endless. Agápe is endless love and it is a backbone of iron to every love and every person who whom it is attached.

Agápe is a shield against failed love; it is a re-ignition to flickering intimacy and death to silent grudges. Agápe loves even when it has been wronged.¹⁰ Consideration and respect, kindness, patience, humility and trust are all included in agápe.¹¹ Getting and keeping agápe is everything to a marriage. Everyone wants to be loved with agápe and we all know it. What we sometimes don't know that loving others with agápe is even better. Being able to love with agápe is the miracle of miracles because to love with agápe is to express the presence of the Creator.

But if agápe strengthens all of the other loves, why does love die? And where does eros go? Why does it have to end?

7. John 2:1-11

8. First John 4:8 "...God is agápe"

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

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

11. See First Corinthians. Consideration: "agápe does not act unbecomingly" (v.5); jealousy: "agápe is not jealous" (v.4); kindness: "agápe is kind" (v.4); patience: "agápe is patient" (v.4); selflessness "agápe does not seek its own" (v.5); absence of anger: "agápe is no provoked" (v.5); steadfastness: "agápe endures all things" (v.7); faith: "agápe believes all things" (v.7); "But now abide faith, hope and agápe, but the greatest of these is agápe" (v.13).

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Why Does Love End?

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Only one thing can make love die and cause agápe to leave. That one thing is sin. Sin causes agápe to leave because sin impedes or prevents us from knowing God and agápe comes from knowing God. Agápe comes from knowing God because God is agápe.¹² Therefore to have agápe we must know God and to know God we must turn from sin.¹³

Knowing God is to experience His life (eternal life) now, in this life¹⁴ and Sin prevents us from knowing God.

Sin kills. It does not maim or hinder or compromise. It kills. God warns that sin kills throughout the entire Bible. He thunders this warning through centuries upon centuries of scripture. "Sin kills." It is as if the Creator takes all of humanity by the shoulders and shakes us saying, "Sin kills. Why won't you listen!"

"The soul who sins will die."¹⁵

Adultery kills love; insults kill love; slander kill love; zingers kill love; disrespect kills love; flirting kills love; anger kills love; drunkenness kills love; dishonesty kills love. These things do not simply injure love. They kill it. They kill it first in the person who commits the sins because sin kills agápe and without agápe love will die.

Love returns when these sins leave but when they are present, love is not.

But this book is not about adultery, insults or disrespect. This book is not about sins in general. This book is about two particularly dangerous sins that are present in every marriage. If agape is the backbone of love and life, the twin sins are its cancer, working relentlessly and in silence.



12. First John 4:8 "The one who does not [agápe] does not know God, for God is [agápe]..

13. John 14:21

14. John 17:3 "This is eternal life that they might know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ who He has sent."

15. Ezekiel 18:4

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Chapter 4

The Twin Sins

SINS AGAINST LOVE

Scriptural admonitions against sin are not simply rules proclaimed by a distant and arbitrary God. They are explanations given to us by our Creator to show us how we have been made, to show us what works and what doesn't. They are guideposts. We think we inherently know what they are, but we do not. We think we know ourselves and others, but we do not:

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of [spiritual] death.¹

Relationships become burdensome when the full weight of the complexity of people merge. When the deepest emotions are thrown together in a marriage, it is inevitable that there will be a measure of conflict and dissatisfaction. Scripture tells us how it can be avoided entirely.^{2†}

It is as if we are looking at road map in order to go from point A to point B. There are innumerable little towns in between A and B and they all advertise their benefits. Some towns are marvelous but some are not. Some of the advertisements are misleading and the towns are filled with sparkles and sin. We stumble along, learning as we go. If we find ourselves in the wrong town, we start looking for the way out, hoping that the next effort will yield better results. The problem is we just can't fully know about the town until we get there. We need something more than advertisements and a road map. We need something to tell us the best route. That something is scripture.

Scripture is like a template that fits over our road map. It is like a sheet of paper with the best routes cut into the paper so that when it is placed over the map, only the best routes are shown. The towns with sparkles and sin are obscured and other towns with far more rewarding alternatives are shown. There are no shortcuts in the template and although we have the template we are still human and sometimes we look for shortcuts and sometimes we take a different route. We all fall for the sparkles at one time or another. The only issue is how long it takes us to learn—and what is lost in the process.

1. Proverbs 16:25

2. † Yes, *entirely* avoided.

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But not all sin is the same. Some sins target relationships. These are called relational sins. Relational sins are sins against love. They kill love and they kill relationships.

Of course, there are many different relational sins because any sin that damages a relationship is a relational sin.

Some sins damage relationships overtly, such as insults or infidelity. Dealing with sins of this nature may not be easy, but it is clearly defined and there is rarely any question about the damage that it causes. Overt relational sins are obvious and clear-cut. They are obvious; they have a start and they have a finish. They kill love just like all sin kills love. But once they are revealed, they can be dealt with.

This book is not about overt relational. It is written about two particular silent relational sins. These sins are present in every marriage and they are often more destructive than overt sins because they are not viewed as sin but as part of normal life. And, because they are not viewed as sin, they are not corrected. They are in the shadows and they kill slowly. They are the sins of criticism and unforgiveness.

Criticism and unforgiveness are sins against love because they are the opposite of love. Love is acceptance and these sins are the embodiment of rejection.

The Sin of Criticism

The Greek word for criticism is κρίνω (krino). When applied to the judgment that people customarily pass on the lives and actions of others, the word means to judge, to pass judgment upon, to express an opinion about, to criticize or find fault with.³ To judge means to criticize.

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

3. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (University of Chicago Press), 2d Ed. 1958, p. 451, s.v. κρίνω, 1. "separate, distinguish, then select, prefer" 2. "judge, think, consider" 3. "pass judgment upon,; "reach a decision, decide"... 6. "of the judgment which people customarily pass upon...the lives of their fellowmen. Judge, pass judgment upon, express an opinion about (citing Matthew 7:1)...especially in an unfavorable sense pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn..."

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Do not judge [criticize] so that you will not be judged [criticized]. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you^{4†}

Christ is telling us plainly “Do not judge.” Do not be critical or condemnatory because we will be judged “with the same standard of measure” that we use to measure others. The word picture that Christ uses here is a man selling grain. He dips a cup into the grain and measures out a portion for his customer. But how big is the cup? Christ is saying that the cup of acceptance that you use to relate to others is the same cup that God will use to relate to you.

His admonition not to criticize is not limited to sharp words but includes thoughts as well:

And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?⁵

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us not to have an “evil eye.” An “evil eye” is a critical eye, an eye that looks for bad and finds it every time. It is an eye that judges and criticizes.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!⁶

We are to carefully avoid the critical eye even when it appears justified; even when we are injured. This is done by simply deciding that we will not condemn another person at all. We can and should avoid those who injure us⁷ but when we come to the line where condemnation begins, we stop. We can, and should, go to those who have injured us and request or demand that they stop and ask for an

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

5. Matthew 7:3. See also Proverbs 23:7 “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

6. Matthew 6:23

7. Proverbs 27:12 “A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, The naive proceed and pay the penalty.”

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apology⁸ but when we reach the line of verbal criticism, we stop. Is the offending party an enemy? We are commanded to love our enemies,⁹ but we are free to avoid them.

Matthew 7:1 is all inclusive. It contains no limiting factor such as “don’t be hasty in your judgment” or “be sure that your criticism is justified” or “It’s OK to think that way if you’re right.” Instead, the prohibition is a blanket prohibition: “Judge [criticize] not.” Thus, it makes no difference whether the judgment or criticism is accurate or inaccurate, true or false, justified or unjustified. Whether the criticism is deserved or undeserved makes no difference.¹⁰ Nor does it matter if the criticism is not expressed. Unexpressed criticism is potentially more dangerous than criticism that is expressed. Criticism does not have to be verbalized to be real.

The greatest reason why Christ commands us not to criticize others is because criticism assaults the love of the person who criticizes; it is a relational sin. It is a piece of rejection and it is the opposite of love. When the offending party is a spouse, the unspoken criticism or condemnation in the offended spouse kills the love of that spouse. And the verbalized criticism of the offended spouse kills the love of the other, offending spouse. And does the offending spouse deserve it. Yes. But love dies in the process. What is more valuable, the retribution, the vent or the family? Continual offenses kill love. And continual responsive natural criticism and defensiveness kill love as well. The question for the survival of the family is not who is right and who is wrong, but who is willing to stop the circle from turning.

The word “criticize” or “judge” is not the same as the word “condemn.” So, when Jesus commands us not to judge, He is not saying “do not condemn others.” He is telling us not to judge others even if our judgment is not condemnatory. In Luke 6:37 we find another statement made by Christ. In the Luke passage, both words used. The command in Luke is not to judge *and* not to condemn:

8. See Matthew 18:15 “And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.”

9. Matthew 5:44 “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

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

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Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.¹¹

These passages prohibit the relational sin of criticism of a person. But scripture is not telling us to pretend that sin does not exist or to ignore the fact that someone is committing it.

We are to recognize sin for what it is, but we are not to judge the person who commits it. Simply put, we are commanded not to conclude that anyone is a “bad” person for any reason. That conclusion is up to God and God alone. We are to recognize and to judge the sin, but we are not to judge the sinner.

Depending on what the sin is and the circumstances that engender it, we may well conclude that someone's company is unwise or even dangerous and therefore we may choose to avoid him, and this is wisdom. But we are forbidden to condemn anyone because of his or her sin. We are to let it pass¹² and we are free to let him or her pass as well but we must do so as the result of wisdom, not criticism and condemnation.

Indeed there are numerous scriptures that counsel us to stay away from people whose company may be damaging:

Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.¹³

Make no friendship with an angry man [or woman]; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.¹⁴

Avoid the immoral woman [or man].¹⁵

11. Luke 6:37

12. Scripture does not use the word “prejudice” because prejudice means to “pre-judge” someone. Scripture forbids all judgment, whether it be “pre” or “post.” Categorizing people based upon their inherent value is sin. Every man is made in God’s image and there are not boxes in heaven.

13. First Corinthians 15:33

14. Proverbs 22:24

15. Proverbs 5:3-6 “For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two edged sword. Her ways are movable, that thou canst not know them.”

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Avoid liars.¹⁶

Avoid the gossip;¹⁷ don't be a gossip.¹⁸ Gossip is a sin that God places on a level equal to murder.¹⁹

He that keeps his mouth keeps his life.²⁰

Contention comes by means of pride.²¹ Avoid the proud and self-centered.

Fools make a mock of sin.²² Avoid the fool who mocks sin and thereby mocks righteousness.

Shun pride. "Pride goeth ... before a fall."²³

And perhaps the most important:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness²⁴◇

16. Proverbs 6:19 "... the Lord doth hate ... a false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

17. Proverbs 26:22,23 "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceases." Proverbs 20:19 "...do not associate with a gossip." (nasv)

18. Psalm 101:5 "Whosoever privily slandereth his neighbor him will I cut off."

19. Romans 1:29 "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness ... murder, debate [contentions], deceit, malignity; whisperers [gossips], backbiters, haters of God..."

20. Proverbs 13:3 "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."

21. Proverbs 12:10 "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."

22. Proverbs 14:9 "Fools make a mock of sin: but among the righteous *there is favor.*"

23. Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

24. Second Corinthians 6:14 ◇ See an expanded treatment of this subject in the following pages. Many of those who have seen many years in Christ have seen the tragic accuracy of this scripture too many times. Anyone on the threshold of disobeying this scripture would be well advised to reconsider,

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These scriptures are written to be lived. And when we live them, their power is both expressed and experienced. These scriptures are more than just smart. They are the most effective means to avoid adversity in this life. They are the means by which we experience the presence and the power of God.

Everyone has a cross to bear and these scriptures are telling us not to criticize others for how they bear theirs but at the same time to stay clear of danger.

Taking Offense

To take offense is to harbor critical and condemnatory thoughts or to hold a grudge. Certainly, when we receive an injury it hurts and we have no choice but to feel emotional or even physical pain. But when it comes to taking up an offense, we certainly do have a choice. Scripture tells us that the correct choice is always to decline the offense.

And, indeed, taking up offense does not alleviate the pain. It prolongs it.

It is as if two people were sitting across from each other at a table. Both of them know that throwing offenses at one another is sin, but one of them throws one anyway. The offense strikes the other person and injures him and then lands back on the table. Now it is the injured person's turn. He can either pick up the offense and throw it back or hold it for later, or he can leave the offense on the table. Scripture tells us to leave it on the table because throwing an offense is sin and it doesn't matter who threw it first.

A man's discretion makes him slow to anger,
And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.²⁵

The one who throws the insult does so because he is critical and condemnatory. Without criticism, there can be no (intentional) insult. When two parties yield to scripture, there are no insults. As for unintentional insults, when two parties yield to scripture there is no offense.

25. Proverbs 19:11

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How we deal with offense determines how God deals with us because God extends to us the same acceptance or rejection that we extend to others.²⁶† The greater the offense, the greater the opportunity to establish the liberality with which God relates to us. A greater offense provides us with a larger cup to measure out the grains of forgiveness and acceptance.

Herein lies another facet of the great irony that shines throughout scripture. The greatest tragedies are turned into the greatest blessings.²⁷† He makes beauty from ashes and righteousness from sin.²⁸ It all depends on what we do with the pain. The greater the harm suffered, the greater the benefit becomes when we place it in His hands. God is in the business of turning lead into gold—and giving us the opportunity to be a part of it. Life is the crucible where He he does His work. And it hurts. It's supposed to hurt. Gold is derived from the choices that we make when we are in the crucible, but without the crucible, the choices are meaningless.

On the worldly surface of these arguments is the immediate fear that unless we defend ourselves we will be injured all the more. And if we do nothing we will live with unrequited injuries and resentments and justice will never be done! But the iniquity and the injustice and the emotional pain cannot be resolved by further conflict. The resolution of the internal turmoil and pain that is created by unanswered slights and unjustified accusations does not come from the acquiescence of the other party. It comes from God Himself. The resolution of emotional turmoil is a miraculous occurrence that comes from the presence of Christ Himself as He abides within us²⁹ and conveys His presence with the same measure of liberality that we have given to the one who offended us.

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

27. † God uses all situations to the advantage to those who are called by Him. Romans 8:28 “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

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

29. John 14:23

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Simply not responding to a verbal attack is effective in any event if for no reason other than anger that would have otherwise prompted defensive verbal injury eventually subsides with time—and leaves no destructive memories for the other party to deal with. This is normal emotional course. But miracle comes later.

The miracle comes when the injured party is left with a fractured love, an affection that has lost its substance as a result of anger and defensive measures taken by the other party. It is the accumulation of these injuries that ultimately brings one to the conclusion that love has simply vanished. Because it has. The miracle is getting it back again. The miracle occurs with total, to the letter, obedience to scripture, and the primary element of that is the wholesale abandonment of all critical thoughts. And just doing that is miraculous.

Harboring critical thoughts (a critical spirit) because of what someone did is just as much a sin as whatever it was he or she did to cause us to be critical.³⁰ Harboring the resentments that normally arise from criticism is holding a grudge. Just because we say nothing after taking up an offense does not mean that we are not committing a relational sin. This sin is not just the injurious words; the sin is criticism³¹ because criticism injures the other person and creates a root of bitterness in the party who criticizes. The root of bitterness is not only sin,³² but continuing sin. Christ is telling us that we are never to permit a root of bitterness to start growing. Christ is telling us to leave the offense on the table. Do not pick it up.

And if we falter and take up the offense, the cure is forgiveness. And just as taking up the offense in the first place was sin, retaining it is equally a sin—because unforgiveness is sin.

The Sin of Unforgiveness

Jesus commands us to forgive *without reservation* and to forgive from the heart.

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

31. Matthew 7:1 “Judge [criticize] not...”

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

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Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven!' ³³

The command to forgive is blanket. There is no condition attached to it. It is not justice. It is not given in exchange and it may well not be deserved in the least. But it is commanded. We are commanded to forgive even when it hurts. And when it is impossible to forgive we are to go to God and confess that we cannot forgive and ask for the power to forgive. Some have said that the answer to this prayer is God's favorite miracle. It happens.

Forgiving someone who deserves to be forgiven is not forgiveness it is justice. Jesus does not tell us to dispense justice. God dispenses justice; we are to forgive. We are to forgive when it hurts, forgive when we are in the right and forgive when forgiveness is impossible. He tells us to forgive when we can no longer forgive and then forgive again. Forgive just because he told us to forgive. Never cease to forgive. Live in an ocean of forgiveness. Forgiveness is *freedom*. ³⁴

Forgiveness is absolutely essential to the presence of Christ because it was our need for forgiveness that brought Jesus Christ to earth in the first place. God has zero patience with those who enjoy the eternal forgiveness purchased by the death of Christ but then refuse to extend their own comparatively minimal forgiveness to others:

Matthew 18 recounts Jesus' parable of the unjust steward. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who had accounts to settle with some of his servants. Perhaps they had stolen from him or misused their authority, but the amount owed implies some type of fraud or theft. The unjust steward owed the king 10,000 denari, an impossible sum that he could not pay. The unjust steward begged for mercy and the king forgave him and released his debt. But then the unjust steward went out and found one of his own debtors who owed him 100 denari. He demanded payment but the debtor did not have the money so the unjust steward had him thrown into prison. Then the king heard about it and summoned the unjust steward saying

33. Matthew 18:21,22. Literally "seventy sevens."

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

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" 'You wicked servant! I forgave all your debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had on you? In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should repay all that he owed. That is how My Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.'"³⁵

Forgiveness is immensely important in God's eyes.

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

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.³⁶

The presence of Christ comes to us when we keep His word³⁷ and His word is a command to forgive without reservation. When we keep His word He abides in us.³⁸ The experiential Christian life begins with obedience to His commandments, and the foundation of these commandments is a life of continual forgiveness and an absence of any

35. Matthew 18:33-35

36. Matthew 6:14 † This scripture refers to how God relates to us in this life. It does not refer to our eternal destiny. In this life God treats us with the same liberality with which we treat others. See Matthew 7:1 that refers to the sin of judgment. God uses the same measure to relate to us as we use to relate to others. If we commit the sin of unforgiveness, our relationship with God will be marred until we forgive. We cannot lose the salvation given by Christ because the forgiveness earned by Christ is unconditional. It was earned by Christ, not by us, and Christ who earned it through no merit of ours chooses to give it to us free and clear (Ephesians 2:8,9). The accomplishment of the cross is not so minimal as to be left open to the frivolous whims and inevitable sins of man (Romans 8:38). Man can neither earn it, acquire it or dispose of it by himself. God's gift of salvation is free and unconditional (Ephesians 2:8,9). Knowing God as a result of that gift, however, is not a free gift. Knowing God is conditional on sincere obedience to Him (John 14:21,23) because God does not lend His presence to sin. See Chapter 11.

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

38. 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."

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condemnation of others. Obedience to His commands will result in a spiritual communion with Christ and the continued awareness of immense internal freedom.³⁹◇

Never permit one thimbleful of the poison of resentment to pollute the crystal waters of God's agápe. *Free yourself.* True forgiveness is true victory. True forgiveness is true freedom. Christ was referring to all sin, including the sin of unforgiveness, when He said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."⁴⁰ The perverted wisdom of the world teaches that amorality (immorality) is freedom, but the opposite is true. Immorality is slavery.⁴¹ Righteousness is freedom and righteousness necessarily includes unlimited forgiveness.

Righteousness is the love language of God. The core of First Corinthians 13 is unconditional love, which necessarily includes unconditional forgiveness. First Corinthians is God's description of agápe.⁴²† God is agápe.⁴³ The core of forgiveness is agápe. Forgiveness is the most powerful and magnificent expression of God's presence that man can exhibit.

The apex of forgiveness occurred at the cross when Jesus Christ paid for the sins of the entire world⁴⁴ and then offered forgiveness for free to anyone who wants it to accept it.⁴⁵

God gives the strength to forgive but we must make the first move.

39. John 8:36 "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." ◇This statement and Christ's other statements relating to knowing Him are indelible evidence of the divine authorship of scripture because they are not directed to a theological concept, but to a reality that we experience.

40. John 8:36

41. Romans 6:16 "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"

42. † Agápe is the original Greek word that is translated "love" or "charity" in First Corinthians 13 is

43. First John 4:8

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

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

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

Sadly, the internal conflict we feel following an offense, the missing justice and the emotional fire that burns in the aftermath of the injury are often reason enough for us not to forgive.

So often we yield only to the scriptures that please us. And we circumvent the others and decorate the pleasant ones with scrolls and butterflies and put them on our walls. And like the hypocrites trumpeting their alms in the temple, we have our reward.

But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.⁴⁶

Forgive. Never cease to forgive. Live in a ocean of forgiveness. Be truly free. The more difficult forgiveness is, the stronger we become when we do it.

The Twin Sins and the Marriage Circle

The scriptural marriage is like a circle filled with all four loves. It is intended to be a place of rest and complete acceptance. There should be no unresolved issues lingering within the marriage circle and no grudges and no unforgiveness. There should be only trust and love. When we place criticism, condemnation or unforgiveness into the circle, it is pouring sewer water into a well.

The circle of marriage is different from the circle of friendship, because when criticism or unforgiveness enters the circle of friendship, the offended friend is free to redraw his circle and to limit or end the relationship. But in a biblical marriage, the marriage circle is drawn by scripture and it cannot be redrawn by the parties or it will no longer be a scriptural marriage.⁴⁷† So, when either of the parties places criticism or unforgiveness in the circle, it cannot be removed by changing the circle's diameter. It will remain in the circle as long as it is unforgiven.

46. Matthew 6:14

47. † One must be married in order to have a scriptural marriage. Informal commitments cannot be marriage. See Jesus' comment in John 4:18, "... you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband."

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Christ commands both parties to treasure the unconditional love and acceptance (the agápe) that is in the marriage circle⁴⁸ and to keep the circle unpolluted with any sin. If both parties obey, then each party will be unconditionally accepted and love will flow. If both parties do not obey, then each party will not be unconditionally accepted and love will not flow. But both parties must drink from the same well whether it be dirty or clean, and the pollution by one affects the water drunk by both.

After the sin that originally caused the criticism and unforgiveness has come and gone, the injured party may still refuse to forgive. If so, the injured party has received a double hit. He receives the initial injury and its emotional consequences, and then he receives the consequence of unforgiveness, which is a root of bitterness and the absence of God's presence.

Like a tiger stalking a wounded antelope, Satan stalks the wounded Christian. The devil ignores the original offender because he knows that his sin has come and gone or that the offender may repent at any time. But Satan smells blood in the unforgiving heart, the heart that remembers. It is that heart, the offended, bitter heart, that is the easy kill. And he knows that when that heart dies, so does the family because the family requires two hearts to survive.



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

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Chapter 5

The Coin Game

THE MECHANICS OF DYING LOVE

The coin game is death to a marriage.

In the coin game each offense becomes a “coin” that is retained for later use by the one who has been offended.

To see how this works, let us consider two scenarios. The first scenario is where the offense is declined and the second is where the offense is taken.

When the Offense is Declined

Suppose that Jack injures Jill with an insult or an inconsiderate act and it hurts Jill's feelings. But Jill says nothing. Although Jill did not deserve the insult that Jack gave her, she looks to scripture and scripture tells her to forgive Jack from her heart and not to take up the offense that Jack has thrown at her. She sees that the offense and the hurt are two different things and she declines to take up the offense even though it hurts. She forgives Jack from her heart and leaves the offense on the table. The burn caused by the offense eventually subsides and Jill forgives from her heart. Jill is not "sweeping the offense under the rug" she is killing it. She is leaving it on the table and she kills it with forgiveness. Jill is now free. She has no lingering resentment, no root of bitterness, and nothing to inhibit her expression of love and no reason to ever bring it up. Christ enables forgiveness.

Jack, however, is not free because Jack, for all of his pretense, has found satisfaction in what he has done and he knows it and now lives with unrepented sin. When Jill declined the offense, she deprived Jack of his opportunity to verbally justify what he had done. Jack is now faced with an emotional dynamic that he has to deal with it. Jack's scales of justice become unbalanced and he must either live with his sin or come to Jill and apologize. He has no other choice. If he does eventually come to her and apologize, his apology will be sincere and that is the goal of scripture. If he apologizes, Jill is required to forgive him and effect a reconciliation. But until then, Jill has forced him to live with what he did. By permitting Jack's emotional conflict to remain she is forcing him to turn.

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When the Offense is Taken

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On the other hand, let us consider what happens if Jill acts on her feelings and rejects the command of Christ in Matthew 7:1. Instead, she embraces unforgiveness by taking up Jack's offense. Perhaps Jack apologizes and Jill tells him that she forgives him. But even though scripture tells her that she must forgive Jack from her heart,¹ she does not do so. She says the words but she keeps the offense. Keeping the offense is relational sin² and words without heart are meaningless.

She may believe that she can't forgive because of the way Jack made her feel. She reasons that because Jack made her feel bad she is justified in keeping the offense. She reasons that she did nothing wrong. It was Jack who made her feel bad, not her. He hurt her and she cannot just ignore it. Accordingly, she retains the offense because she feels justified. The offense remains there, inside, just one more step toward a relationship that is pure fake.

God has commanded Jill to forgive from the heart and not to judge or criticize. She disobeys these commands and there are consequences. It doesn't make any difference whether the Jill knows that it is sin not. Why? Because God's word is not there just to make God happy. God's word is there to reveal what we are really dealing with. It is there to disclose a reality, a danger, that is obscured by a natural impulse.³ Good faith or mistaken belief on Jill's part does not make the danger disappear.

It is like the young girl who was leaving for college. She had packed the car and was ready to leave when her father stopped her and said "Honey, I forgot to tell you. When you get gas, don't use the green pump." But she had little faith in her Father's word and she later she saw that the large trucks and expensive cars used the green pump. She paid the price of disobedience and spent her college years without a car.

Both Jack and Jill have sinned and both Jack and Jill will pay the price. They have both adulterated their love.

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

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

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

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Having taken up the offense, Jill will now internalize it and the offense will become a “coin” that can be used later on to justify retribution against Jack. Jack owes her now and Jill means to collect.

Or perhaps Jill did not initially intend to ever use the coin, but she soon discovers that if she keeps the coin, things that she may say or do against Jack can be justified. She can pay for what she does with the coin. And as long as she has the coin she does not have to forgive Jack. Jack deserves what he gets and Jill keeps her coin. Jill remembers.

But coins always demand some type of response because no one can live comfortably with unforgiveness. Coins and guilt inevitably demand an outlet. The outlet may be venting or it may be an unexpressed emotional response. Or it may be self-pity or repeated dissatisfaction and complaining. It may be a distancing from Jack that Jill cannot reverse. Or, it may take a more overt form and be used to justify adultery or some type of retribution, such as gossip or perhaps just plain anger that explodes at the next convenient excuse. But it will always be something because coins demand expression and that expression is always destructive. Vengeance can be satisfying, but vengeance is sin⁴ and sin kills.

Where there is continuous anger or criticism, there is always something under the surface, such as guilt or condemnation.

Perhaps Jack's sin was just too much for Jill to forgive, or perhaps it just takes too long. Or perhaps Jack will not repent of it and apologize. Or perhaps Jill is just plain spiteful and unforgiving. Or maybe it was Jill who commits the sin and Jack is the spiteful one. It does not make any difference whose fault it is because sin does not care. Both will pay—and so will their children. And Satan will have his due.

When the collection of coins becomes large enough and with a sufficiently broad enough spectrum of different kinds of offenses, it reaches the point where the owner may confer upon himself or herself the title of *Victim*.

Once the title of Victim has been conferred, every perceived offense can be used to solidify the title. The Victim is now searching for offenses for that very purpose. And it is always a successful search because the Victim finds offenses in the most unlikely places and stores each one of them safely in the coin purse.

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

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With sufficient coins in her coin purse, Jill no longer has to burden herself with the embarrassment and humiliation of confession of whatever sins she commits against Jack. She feels that she can unburden herself of her own guilt, by pointing to the appropriate coin or to the title of Victim and her sin is balanced in her mind. And if it is not fully balanced, the anesthetic of self-pity is always available to numb the reality of what is happening. Jill keeps her coins and covers her sin with them.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of acquiring the title of Victim is that the use of the coins is no longer limited to justification against the perpetrator who enabled her to put them there. They have now become generalized and can be used anywhere because the Victim is now a victim of life in general. But sin is sin and it has only one cure and that cure is not coins. The only cure is Jesus Christ, but Jesus requires forgiveness in order to experience His freedom. And forgiveness means the relinquishment of all coins.

The phrase “Hurting people hurt people” is the mantra of the coin gamers. It means, “I have been injured so I am justified in injuring others.” It is a truism for the unforgiving heart, because unforgiving people will always use their own hurt to justify hurting others. That is what the coin purse is: justification. People who chant that mantra have achieved the title of Victim. Another justification is “Speak the truth in love.”⁵ Although this phrase is taken from scripture, it is not a justification for venting and criticism. It refers to discussions that relate to biblical doctrine. Christians should not be “carried about by every wind of doctrine”⁶ but rather “speak the truth [true doctrine] in love.”⁷

People who keep coins are unhappy people. The more coins they keep, the more guilt they can balance and the more unhappiness they accumulate. They are not free people. Coins are the soil that nourishes the root of bitterness and the root of bitterness grows deep. Bitterness blooms in the heart of the coin gamer like flowers on winding briars.⁸

5. Ephesians 4:15

6. Ephesians 4:14

7. Ephesians 4:15

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

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In our example, Jill is indeed a victim, but not in the way that she thinks. She is a victim of her own unforgiveness because the coins are rotting her spiritual life from within. Some Victims are Christians who confess the root of bitterness but keep the coins anyway because they are afraid to let them go. Without them they would have to face their own guilt and face the reality of how they have lived.

Giving up the coins would mean that the scale of guilt from unforgiven sin would become unbalanced and fall back hard upon them, because coins are used to obscure the guilt. They obscure guilt but they cannot forgive the sin that causes it. Only Jesus Christ can forgive the sin.⁹ The coin-gamer must also go to those who have been injured and ask forgiveness.¹⁰

As long as Jill keeps the coins, forgiveness from God cannot come to her because he who asks for forgiveness must also confess his own sin:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹¹

One cannot experience the forgiveness of Jesus Christ and at the same time refuse to forgive others.

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

9. Mark 2:10-11 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home."

10. Matthew 5:23, 24 "Therefore 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."

11. First John 1:9

12. Matthew 6:14, 15 † This statement refers to how God deals with us in this life. It does not refer to the eternal state, nor does it mean that unforgiveness, or any sin, can cause anyone to lose a salvation that Christ has already given. In the end, everyone who has turned to Christ forgives and is forgiven.

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Jill's only true remedy is confession and forgiveness, but the coins have become a part of her now; they are valuable and rooted deep. She keeps them and says whatever she is expected to say about forgiveness.

Ultimately, Jill will realize that the coins are spiritual poison. But she cannot let them go. Nor can she keep them because of what they are doing to her. Her only relief is to express the pain that now echoes in the void that is inside her. She is a hurting person and she will hurt others. She needs help. Her doctor gives her pills to make her feel better.

Like a pressure cooker with a broken valve, Jill must relieve the pressure of unforgiveness or explode. She relieves the pressure by expression and the expression may be directly to Jack or, for the sake of peace, it may be to friends about Jack. When it is to friends, it is called gossip (slander). Gossip lays practically on the bottom of the sin barrel:

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and hatred. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips...¹³

Gossip is on par with murder in this scripture, and those who practice it are worthy of death.¹⁴† God promises that He will destroy or cut-off those who practice this sin.¹⁵† The practical and immediate consequence of this sin is to be cut-off from God's presence and peace.

13. Romans 1:29

14. Romans 1:32 "...those who practice such things are worthy of death..."
† Taken with other scriptures, the implication here is that these sins will result in effective spiritual death—the total absence of spiritual life. See John 14:21 and 14:23 which require obedience to experience the presence of God. To know God, which is to experience His presence within, is to experience eternal life (spiritual life) in this (mortal) life (John 17:3). One cannot experience eternal life and spiritual death at the same time.

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

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Scripture does not require that the gossip to be false in order to be sin.^{16†} It need only be a derogatory report about someone else when it is told to someone who is neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. Gossip is slander and it does not matter if it is true. It is still slander.

Coin gamers are compulsive gossips. Scripture commands against it¹⁷ but slander is their primary outlet. It relieves the pressure because each slander bolsters the belief that the speaker is justified and gossip becomes self-perpetuating.

A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer
separates intimate friends.¹⁸

Gossips will find other gossips who are willing to listen to them and ratify their slander with sympathetic words and sounds. They are verifying the title of Victim and they are relieving themselves.

If the coin gamer is the wife, she will find another wife with whom she can commiserate about her husband. They share stories and gossip about husbands passes quietly over cups of coffee. Seeds are planted and the initiated wife returns home wondering if she will see verification to show that her newly minted suspicions about her husband are correct. And sure enough, something inevitably occurs that confirms to her that he is indeed imperfect and deserving of her condemnation. She knows that each imperfection is only an indication that darker sins are under the surface.

Marriages can withstand bankruptcy, death, loss of jobs, illness, accidents and even adultery, and sometimes grow stronger because of it. But when faced with the coin gamers and their cups of coffee the love, that is the core of the marriage, will die. Why will the love die? Because condemnation kills the love of the one who condemns. Try it. Cease all verbal and internal criticism (condemnation) and see what happens.

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

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

18. Proverbs 16:28

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Any wife who permits herself to slander or listen to slander about her husband is adulterating her marriage. Any husband who permits himself to slander or listen to slander about his wife is adulterating his marriage. It is the duty of each spouse to defend the other and in doing so to defend the family in the process. Listening to slander is to permit the entire family to be compromised.

The presence of God departs a little more with each relational sin.¹⁹ And when the presence of God departs so does His agápe. His agápe departs because He *is* agápe.²⁰ God does not share quarters with sin. When God's agápe departs, the coin game is left with whatever remnant of human love that can co-exist with an established root of bitterness. Not much.

Jack and Jill may believe that the problem with their marriage is the failure of the other to admit what they have done. Or it may be because the other does not realize the extent of the damage he or she has done with words. This may go back and forth for years as they grasp at the last flicker of sincere affection. But eventually, as the numbness spreads, they conclude in silence that they are no longer in love. And they are right.

Their marriage counselor says that their problem is communication and lack of empathy. If they can just make sense of who did and let the blame fall where it is supposed to fall, they can unravel what has happened and get back to where they were and learn to love again so they can save their family. If only they could communicate better or fight fair, they could work it out.

But no. This is what they've been doing for some time now?

What communication skills did Jack and Jill need in order to fall in love in the first place? How long did it take them to learn how to simply understand each other, to hold hands, to talk for hours into the early morning? Have they lost communication skills? No. They never needed anything but love back then. It is love has been lost, not communion skills.

Why has love been lost? Love has been lost because of sin. And sin is generally excluded from marital counseling because it either does not exist or it makes people feel bad.

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

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

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The world's way is to fix the problem is to unravel, explain, vent, redevelop relational skills and assign blame without being offensive. This is no fix at all. The world's way is useless because it does not address the loss of love. One of the most common reasons for the death of love is criticism and unforgiveness. Love is impossible when the twin sins remain.

Method will not save this marriage because the marriage is not the victim of a failed method.

Marriages are healed by eradicating sin because what saves marriages is the same thing that created them in the first place: love. And love comes with the presence of Christ and the presence of Christ comes with righteousness (keeping God's commands). Keeping Christ's commandments is the way that we relate to Him. These scriptures could not be more direct and to the point. They are crystal clear. God's spiritual presence in us is contingent upon our obedience.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.²¹

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me...²²

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make Our abode with him.²³

He who does not love Me does not keep My words...²⁴

Disobedience and unforgiveness does not cause one to lose salvation. But it does cause the departure of the presence of God and with it the departure of love because "God is love."²⁵



21. John 14:15

22. John 14:21

23. John 14:23

24. John 14:24

25. First John 4:8

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Chapter 6

Reproof or Criticism?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

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

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

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

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

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

We are reproofed through scripture.

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

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

He who rebukes a man will afterward find more
favor than he who flatters with the tongue.⁴

What is the difference between reproof and criticism? The difference lies in the motivation for what is said and in how the words are received.

-
1. Proverbs 10:17
 2. Proverbs 1:23
 3. Second Timothy 3:16
 4. Proverbs 28:23

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The motivation behind the words must be edification.⁵ But if well intended words are not received well, they are counterproductive. Therefore, how the statement is taken is *everything* and how the words are phrased often determines how they are taken.

The speaker should first consider if the words should be said and why. Have they already been said? Are they necessary for the hearer or are they necessary for the speaker? If they are necessary for the speaker and the hearer does not want to hear them, then they will probably not be beneficial to the hearer. Are they intended to edify or are they intended to vindicate? Are they intended to warn or are they intended to disparage? Are they spoken to vent the emotions of the speaker or are they spoken to benefit the relationship? Does the speaker intend to bless the hearer or to prove him wrong?

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

It is certainly true, however, that words spoken with the genuine intent to reprove may first be received as critical but later be appreciated as good faith reproof.

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

A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.⁶

But repeated rebuke turns quickly to condemnation and the one who continually repeats criticisms will become odious.

A quarrelsome wife is as annoying as constant dripping...⁷

In order to be effective biblical reproof, the words must be received favorably, even if the favorable understanding comes later. Unless the hearer ultimately hears the words as good faith reproof, they are useless and the hearer remains blind to the reproof.

5. Ephesians 4:29 "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

6. Proverbs 12:10

7. Proverbs 27:5

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

Best to be an encourager until the other places himself in a position where constructive ideas can be exchanged.

But where something absolutely must be said, scripture provides for a confrontation.



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Chapter 7

Scriptural Confrontation

CONFRONTING SOMEONE SCRIPTURALLY

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

The wife who bears the sins of her husband in silence will grow spiritually, but at the same time she is married to a man who is relationally inadequate. She is married to a husband who does not meet her deepest need: intimacy.

Should she remain silent? No.

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

Should he remain silent? No.

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

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

The Scriptural Reason for the Confrontation

Typical to scripture, the biblical approach to confrontation is the opposite of that of the world because the value system is different. For instance, the goal of scriptural confrontation is not vindication. Vindication may occur, but if it does occur, it is a by-product. And retribution, which is the normal course of the world, is non-existent for the

1. Mark 10:8 "But from the beginning of creation, God 'made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh' [Genesis 1:27, 2:24] consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

2. Matthew 18:15

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committed Christian.³ For the scriptural Christian, mutual acceptance and reconciliation is the goal and the only goal. Unconditional acceptance is agápe⁴ and agápe is what God is.⁵

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

Matthew 18:15 tells us the goal of the scriptural confrontation is to win back the very person who has wronged us. On the other hand, the world tells us to confront in order to win a confession, apology, exact justice or force a change of behavior. Scripture is precisely the opposite. One does not confront for the benefit one's self, but for the benefit of the person who has done the injury. Why? Because the person who has committed the injury is the sinner and therefore the weaker brother. It is the weaker brother who lives on the edge of anger and embraces condemnation. It is the weaker brother who must be won back by the stronger. So, for the committed Christian, it is the relationship that wins the day, not justice.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens, you have won your brother.⁶

So, the confrontational scripture is not for “telling someone off.” It is for winning him back again. Scriptural confrontation is done for the purpose of re-establishing the relationship because *it is the relationship that will reform the behavior, not the confrontation*. And it is the person who has been wronged who has the burden to go forward when it is the other party who has damaged the relationship in the first place.

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

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

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

6. Matthew 18:15

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It is as if an intruder (the one who is being confronted) has come into a home and grabbed the baby (the relationship). The world screams, "Get the intruder!" Scripture screams, "Get the baby!"

The goal of the biblical confrontation is not to inform someone that he is hurtful or insulting or inconsiderate because he is certainly already aware of what he has done. He considered it, intended it and did it for his own reasons. On the other hand, if He is not aware of it and he is righteous, then no confrontation is necessary. A simple word from the injured party will suffice to elicit an apology.

The goal of the biblical confrontation is not to vent or assign blame but to create a forum for biblical reproof and productive dialogue that will result in reconciliation with no lingering resentments. When this is done the bond is stronger because the weaker brother now knows that when his weakness betrays him, he will not be excommunicated by the other party. He has been given a piece of freedom and room to grow. The stronger brother is stronger still because his mettle has been tested and he has emerged victorious.

Renewing a relationship and then confronting for the purpose of reiterating a old complaint is, of course, destructive. So, the one confronting must first ask himself, "Am I confronting to save the relationship or for another reason?"

Scriptures that relate to the healing of relationships point first to the sins of unforgiveness and to the resulting critical spirit. Then they point to the cure, which is always agápe—forgiveness and acceptance in spite of sin.

We experience the presence and peace of God when we express agápe either to God or to man. No wonder Christ commanded us to agápe one another.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love [agápe] one another even as I have loved ["agáped"] you, that you also love [agápe] one

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another. By this all men will know that you are
My disciples, if you have love [agápe] for one
another.⁷◇

It is loving one another that is of paramount importance in God's sight. We cannot judge, grudge and agápe at the same time.

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

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

But the results produced when scripture is applied consistently are astounding.

It is the image of Christ to which we are destined.⁸ Christ tells us to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who spitefully use us.⁹ This is where obedience hurts. This is where we do what He tells us when everything else demands the opposite. This is where we love the unlovable, forgive the unjust and refuse to criticize the person, even in the presence of actual sin. Here is where faith is put to the acid test. This is where we do it just because He said so.

7. John 13:34 ◇ Note the magnificent precision of scripture and its profundity. All scripture is "God breathed" (Second Timothy 3:16) and therefore inerrant. Agápe is God's supernatural love and is available only through a relationship with Jesus Christ because "God is [agápe]" First John 4:8. Establishing a viable and experiential relationship with Jesus Christ requires us to follow His commands (John 14:21). To follow His commands is to effectively become His disciple. Therefore, when Christ's disciples (followers) are present, so is His agápe. So, Christ's disciples are known by their agápe. Note also that when Paul wrote First Corinthians 13, he did not have the benefit of the Gospel of John (the above quote) because it had not yet been written, yet the two are perfectly engaged.

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

9. Luke 6:27-29 " But to those of you who will listen, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone takes your cloak, do not withhold your tunic as well....

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And, within the scope of the verbal/emotional conflict that is sometimes marriage, this is the very real place where we die to self.¹⁰

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

For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it;
but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find
it.¹¹

The life that we find in Christ is not simply being alive in this world. The life that we find is His life;¹² and His life can be lived and experienced in the here and now.¹³† It is His life that brings irresistible agápe into the heart, and it is agápe alone that can win the family back again. It is God who restores the love that the errant spouse has relinquished and God does it through Himself and through agápe expressed through the other spouse.

Correcting Bad Behavior

The goal is to re-establish the relationship first, before the behavior is corrected because it is the relationship that motivates the change in behavior. So, behavior cannot be sincerely corrected unless the relationship is re-established. Words, threats and promises may alter behavior for the moment, but they cannot correct the heart. Where pain has been inflicted, the perpetrator needs to know the extent of it; but only desire can correct the heart and it is the value of the relationship that creates the desire to do so. Criticism and condemnation injure relationships; they are precisely the opposite of acceptance.

Therefore, the aggrieved party should make a decision in advance not to retaliate, not to condemn but to say only what the other party will hear. This may not yield a result immediately. But it will begin to open the door for a productive discussion at a later time and ultimately the restoration of the relationship.

10. Matthew 16:24 "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me [to yield to Me], let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me....'"

11. Matthew 16:25

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

13. John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." † Eternal life is knowing God and knowing God is in this life.

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Unless the admonishment was for a clearly defined and intentional sin that has to be addressed, admonishment should not occur at all. Scripture is speaking to two less than perfect people, who will sin and make mistakes and it is saying "Accept each other exactly the way you are. And understand that each of you is imperfect. You just can't see your own imperfections. Give your spouse the freedom to fail."

The secret is this. The more freedom you give the more you get back from God. The more He gives, the more internal peace and inner stability and equanimity you have—think: contentment, happiness. And the more freedom you give, the more latitude you provide to your spouse to correct the issues on his or her own. And correcting issues on one's own is really the only way they will ever be corrected. We all know that.

If only one party yields to scriptural commands, look for a gradual openness in the other party when you cease all condemnation, complaints and criticisms. Look for the beginnings of the return of love in the party who yields, this love is unmistakable and cannot be faked. It is this love that makes the relationship valuable. If both parties yield, then the result will be evident in the stark difference between the biblical confrontation and non-scriptural, confrontations. True yielding on the part of both will eventually result in the restoration of the love that was lost. And when love has been restored it covers the sin that caused it to depart.¹⁴ The goal is for love to make the sins to be irrelevant.

Fidelity

Where there is a continuing marital conflict, certain things must be addressed before any effective reconciliation can occur. If fidelity is an issue, then fidelity will have to be resolved first, because fidelity is an absolute requirement for trust and trust is essential to the marital relationship described in scripture.¹⁵ Infidelity is a bar to sincere reconciliation.

The spouse who has committed physical adultery often finds the need to balance out the guilt. This may be done through condemnation, impatience, anger or compulsive gossip. The guilty spouse is

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

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

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caught in the vice between guilt and confession. The only way out is to cease committing the sin and confess first to God and then to the spouse.¹⁶

This confession will test the mettle of the innocent spouse because the innocent spouse is commanded to forgive. The innocent spouse may divorce if adultery has been committed, but divorce had unpredictable and often tragic results, especially on children.

Fidelity is commanded in numerous scriptures, the most prevalent of which is the sixth commandment, "Do not commit adultery."¹⁷ When adultery has been committed or some other serious sin, biblical confrontation is required.¹⁸

The sin of adultery is classically described as sexual intercourse with someone other than one's spouse. However, adultery is not limited to physical illicit sex. For instance, Christ taught that to look upon a woman and lust after her is to commit adultery in one's heart^{19†} and the admonition against spiritual adultery is prevalent throughout scripture.²⁰

To adulterate means to introduce a foreign substance into something that is pure. When the adultery is in the form of illicit sex, the family itself can become physically adulterated with the seed of a third party or, if the adulterer is the husband, the family's seed may be used to impregnate another family with a foreign seed or start a new one without a father.

16. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

17. Exodus 20:14

18. Matthew 18:15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer."

19. Matthew 5:28 "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." † To lust after someone is to entertain an extreme desire for a sexual encounter. Finding someone else to be attractive or experiencing affection is not lust. One excellent way to approach an inappropriate affection is to pray that God would give you His love for that person.

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

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But adulteration can occur without sex. Indeed, a woman can be more offended by improper non-sexual relationships between her husband and another woman than a physical adultery. Thus, the marital relationship may be adulterated by flirting and unwise emotional connections with others. Relationships of this nature, although they may be fleeting in nature, sow doubt and uncertainty in one's spouse and trust becomes adulterated, diluted.

The clear water of agápe can be adulterated by words, insults that convey rejection. Threats of divorce are adulterations of the marital relationship.

Paul's epistle to Titus refers to elders as being men who are beyond reproach.²¹ And deacons should be "husbands of only one wife..."²² However, the full meaning of this passage is lost in the English translation. The literal original Greek for "husband of one wife"²³ is a "one woman man." Thus, the meaning embraces not only the legal status of being married to one woman, but it also includes the concept of a husband who does not extend or consent to any communication with the opposite sex that carries questionable implications.

Problems may arise in this regard when the two spouses hold different opinions as to what flirting is or what it is not.

One spouse may hold a liberal view and the other spouse may hold a conservative view. But whether one is right and the other is wrong is irrelevant to the relationship because the issue for the relationship is trust, not right or wrong. There is no absolute standard for relating to other women or other men. The goal is to establish trust in the heart of one's spouse, and trust will be established only by operating within the scope of that spouse's understanding of what is appropriate.

21. Titus 1:6 "If any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who are not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach..."

22. First Timothy 3:12

23. First Timothy 3:12 "...μίας [one] γυναικος [woman] ανδρες [man]..."

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*After the Confrontation:
Expressions of Love and Respect to the Wife*

Scripture teaches that it is the husband's duty to love his wife.²⁴ The reason for this is that God has created woman to be loved and to need love. So, scripture teaches husbands to love their wives. This is not simply a rule of behavior; it is a reality that is a part of life. Love is like air to women. Love must be expressed and expressed constantly. With it she becomes comfortable.

Some husbands do not feel the need to express love often because they do not experience the same need for love as the woman. But the issue is, again, not right or wrong; the issue is contentment in the other spouse. The husband who refuses to put his wife first or the refuses to support his family²⁵ commits sin.

The motivation for the expression of love may begin as a duty but it later becomes a pleasure because when it is made and received love is rejuvenated and love is always a pleasure. The more the husband expresses love, the more he opens himself to love and the more he loves the more he expresses love ... It is a spiral going upward.

Since the wife was created differently from the husband, her needs are different. The effect of what the husband says or does will be tempered by her focus and her needs. Her biblical orientation is depen-

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

25. 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."

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dence and love,^{26†} and she receives what he says in the context of that orientation. If the husband fails to voluntarily express love regularly, she may well conclude that his love is diminishing. If she is a biblical keeper of the home,²⁷ this understanding can be quite threatening because her husband is (or is supposed to be) the spiritual, structural and financial support of the family.²⁸

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

Many husbands view this love-characteristic of wives to be unreasonable and overly burdensome especially in view of his very challenging obligation to support his family. The tyranny of daily fatigue can strip the idea of romance from his thoughts as well as hers. But expressions of love engender love in both the speaker and the hearer,

26. † Scripture teaches that the wife is to be loved (Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands love your wives”) and she is to be provided for by the husband (First Timothy 5:8, see below) because she is to be the keeper of the home (Titus 2:5). Wives are “To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands”). ◇ What magnificent balance we find here. The scriptural function of the wife is to nurture, to keep the home, and be protected and provided for by her husband. It is the faithful execution of her role that engenders love from her husband. And it is the faithful execution of his role (loving and providing for his wife), that engenders love from his wife. The wife is the life-giver, the comforter, the lover. She is to be submissive (Ephesians 5:21-24), respectful of her husband (First Peter 3:1-22) and she is the weaker vessel (First Peter 3:7). But the responsibility for her well being falls to the husband. Because scripture gives him the primary responsibility, it also gives him the authority to lead. But he must use his authority for the benefit of his wife and family.

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

28. 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.”

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and love is life.²⁹† God is love and God is spiritual (eternal) life.³⁰ A brief look at the relational scriptures shows a repeated emphasis on love.³¹

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

*After the Confrontation:
Expressions of Respect and Love to the Husband*

Scripture teaches that it is the wife's duty to show respect to her husband.³² The reason for this is because God has created men to require respect. And scripture teaches that we should love one another.³³ So scripture teaches that wives should respect and love their husbands, but for husbands the emphasis is on respect.

Respect is like air to men. With it they can be comfortable. They can respect themselves and respect others. Respect must be expressed by a wife with appreciation directly to the husband and in the absence of complaining and dissatisfaction. Some wives believe that they can compel a husband to love them by complaining, but the best way to release a husband's love to his wife is to show him respect and the best way to destroy it is expressions of dissatisfaction. He can deal with a wife who does not show him respect, but he cannot love her. Complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction are assaults upon what God has made him to be because God has stamped into the biblical husband the need to provide for his family and that means to make his wife content and appreciative. Every expression of discontent is an assault upon what God has made him to be. Every complaint is a statement that says he has failed. Men can withstand only a certain number of these statements.

29. † God is love (First John 4:8 "God is love") and God is life (John 14:6 "I am...life"). Therefore love is life. Love is an expression of the presence of God and God is life (John 14:26).

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

31. See John 14:15,21,23; First John 4:7-20

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

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

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Men are made by the love and respect given by a wife or a girlfriend. This is no theory; it is reality and men feel it. We have all seen it at one time or another, but men and women see it differently. Women do not easily comprehend the effect that their love and respect has on a man. They see their fidelity as loving but men see it as empowering. It's a wife's picture on a desk covered with stress or perhaps it is her picture taped to the control panel fighter plane or the blurred photograph of some freckle faced kid-of-a-girl pinned to the wall in a dorm room next to the bed of a geeky freshman who is destined to turn the world around.

Ladies, you have no idea of the power you hold. These scriptural admonitions are not rules, they are expressions of reality and denying them will deprive the marriage of God's best. A lifetime of contentment is in the balance-and that is to say nothing of a family that may live or die.

The Confrontation Generally

Scripture avoids any specific direction regarding what words to use in a confrontation. But it does teach that the purpose of the confrontation is to win back the brother who has committed the offense³⁴ and thereby re-establish the relationship. Christ has commanded us to love (agápe) one another, not to blame one another.³⁵ Therefore the goal is to love the person who did the injury and to be loved by that person. One does not encourage love through criticism and condemnation whether it be in good faith or not.

The words that we choose for this confrontation must be wholly non-accusatory and also they must not be correctional, because correctional words are critical words to an unwilling ear. And unwilling ears defend; they do not reform. The words must not be framed so as to inform the other party as to how he should correct his behavior unless, of course, he is genuinely open to discuss it, in which case it is not critical.

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

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

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One very effective non-confrontational way to approach the discussion is to frame the initial approach as a request for help. For instance, one may confront by saying “Can you help me understand something? What did you mean when you said ____” or “I understand how you feel when you said ____ but what prompted you to say it?”

Another non-confrontational approach may be “I get the feeling that ____” or simply “Can we make this right?” Or “What do you think about ____?” or “It made me feel hurt when you said _____. Can you help me overcome these feelings. Did you really mean to say that?” Or, on a more “place it on the table now” approach, “What is your purpose in saying that?” The goal is to ensure that the other party is not offended or threatened so that a productive, accepting discussion can follow rather than an argument.

But remember, we are not really dealing with words here. We are dealing with feelings and emotions—powerful emotions. All the words do is express (or betray) what is under the surface.

The cardinal rule is this: The entire discussion must not go beyond the willing ear. Non-accusatory words and soft answers³⁶ that stay within the scriptural parameter will disarm the defensive spouse and create a common ground for a mutually beneficial discussion. The goal is to win back the errant brother or sister and re-establish the relationship. Agápe is the power behind all of the loves and it is love that wins the day, not logic.

Address the sin, but not the sinner.

One must ask one’s self “Do I want to fight and win or do I want to reconcile?” The scriptural goal is reconciliation. Love lives in reconciliation and dies in victory. God has made us ministers of reconciliation.^{37†}

Secular psychology utilizes the biblical approach to confrontation because experience has shown that criticism is a bar to communication. It causes people to become defensive. Wise counselors are therefore non-confrontational. When only acceptance comes from

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

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

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the counselor, the walls come down. Acceptance dissolves walls. Soft, non-condemnatory statements defuse the angry response.³⁸ The same is true for correctional *requests*.

It is the Holy Spirit who has been given the task of convicting of sin, not us.³⁹ When we try it, we just get in the way of the Holy Spirit. God does not permit us to be the accuser because we are just as guilty and as fallible as the one whom we accuse.^{40†} The only difference is that our sin may not be the same. The Christian convicts by accepting and blessing⁴¹ and getting out of the way.

The trick is to understand just how powerful His agápe really is. The confrontational scripture is there in order make sure that he who has injured is aware of all issues and to provide him an opportunity to voluntarily make it right and reconcile. It works only to the extent that each party yields to scripture.

The reason why the scriptural way works is because in the scriptural confrontation, the sinning brother is not being threatened by the opposing party's criticisms, complaints or condemnations. Instead, he is being accepted by the other party and convicted by the Holy Spirit.⁴² As long as the offended party does not interpose himself and assume the role of the Holy Spirit by complaining and demanding corrections, the only way that the offending party can escape conviction is to repent, apologize and cease to sin.

38. Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turns away wrath.

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

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

41. Proverbs 25:22 " If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. For in so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you."

42. John 16:8 "...when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

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The Incurrigible

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But what happens when the errant spouse does not respond? What of the husband who prefers to stay home while his wife works?⁴³ What of the spouse who simply will not cease drunkenness? What of the spouse who will not cease adultery or cease flirting or demeaning? What then? The answer is always scripture. Look to scripture.

God has provided consequences for sin. He has structured a world where each of us is free to choose our sin, but none of us is free to choose the consequences.

We are to do all that we can to bring the perpetrator who repeatedly sins back to reconciliation and righteousness but nothing in scripture ever says that we should enable sin—and thereby perpetrate it. If the sin is rare, then a lenient response is appropriate. If the sin is repeated and never corrected, we are not to enable it. To enable or to ignore repeated sin is to perpetuate that sin. God has provided a natural consequence for all sin and he has not provided us to enable the sin to be repeated by alleviating the consequences of the sin. God's obvious intention is that we should learn from our mistakes.

God has not called us to ignore or to perpetuate sin. Sin kills. When we perpetuate sin we perpetuate death. God has provided consequences for sin and He has not appointed us to prevent those consequences from occurring. Should we do what we can to alleviate the consequences of a single regretful mistake? Certainly. Should we engage in a lifestyle that enables and perpetuates sin. Certainly not.

The spouse of the unrepentant sinner is placed in the difficult position of determining when he or she is enabling and when he or she is helping. For instance the consequence of the sin of the indolent husband who refuses to work may be for the wife to refuse to work and thereby force the family into bankruptcy. But bankruptcy is not a sin⁴⁴† whereas the refusal to provide for one's family is.⁴⁵ The wife who enables alcoholism by covering the sin and continually rescuing

43. 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."

44. Deuteronomy 15:1,2 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debt. And this is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed." † Bankruptcy was invented in the Bible.

45. First Timothy 5:8.

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is perpetuating the sin and damaging her husband and her family. The husband who fails to correct the sins of his son is using his very significant position of Father to validate those sins and perpetuate them.

The husband or wife who ignores sexual child abuse is enabling that sin and permanently injuring the child. The remedy and the obligation of the parent is to immediately remove the child from the threat and report the matter to the police. Where harm of that magnitude is at issue, patient confrontation and reconciliation is overridden by actual and immediate danger. Do not hesitate to immediately protect your child.

Imagine

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

If that were the case, then you would never be condemned; you would never be criticized (unless you wanted to be, which is not criticism but constructive reproof); you would never hear old wrongs reiterated; you would be fully accepted and appreciated for who you are and forgiveness would come as naturally and peacefully as a spring rain—no pain, no pay-back, no resentment, just a free gift. There would be no reminders, no rejections and no regrets. No eggshells to walk around; no triggers; no fear. You would be loved with an unconditional love that never ends. You would be fully accepted for who you really are and you would know that you could rely on your spouse until the end of your days.

Now imagine that both parties did that. Imagine that every problem was addressed without retribution, without anger, without justification, without self-defense, without any offense and in an environment of complete forgiveness, unconditional acceptance and in a sincere mutually constructive discussion for the sole purpose of resolution for the betterment of the marriage and the family with each party treating the other as better than himself.⁴⁶ Imagine that each party complied with the requests of the other party not because they were reasonable and necessary but because compliance was not a duty but an opportunity to express love. That is a scriptural Christian marriage and it is possible because God empowers it.⁴⁷

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

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

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In that environment, agápe flourishes and merges with all of the loves. Agápe is endless love and it is free for the asking and the yielding. When this occurs we experience His presence and peace. His love becomes like an overflowing river. It is everywhere. It all comes from scripture. Scripture is the key.

Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant
loveth it.⁴⁸

It is for this reason that a decision not to take offense and instead to forgive from the heart is not “sweeping the dust under the rug.” It is precisely the opposite; it is not touching the dust. It is backing away so that the dust will not be blown into the air with verbal fisticuffs. It is depriving the offender of a forum to try to justify what he has done. It is moving out of the way so that the Holy Spirit can act and it is permitting the sin to remain in the open so that the only One who is truly capable of dealing with it can do so freely.

It is the Holy Spirit who deals with the attributions of fault and the tangled history of all the injuries and vindications. He takes the failures and all the injuries, all the violated rights and all the just retributions, all the anger and all the hatred, all the conditions and rejections and all the disappointments and rolls them into a ball of pain and pitches it to the cross. At the cross, the blood of Jesus Christ melts it into a sea of forgiveness and it is no more.



48. Psalm 119:140

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Chapter 8

Defensiveness

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

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

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

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

It is painful when anyone assaults our self-perception with critical, complaining, condemnatory words. Words of this nature are rejections of who we are; they are threatening and they are sin.¹ Nevertheless, scripture tells us that we are to receive them without taking offense.² Scripture forbids criticism and condemnation from both directions, from either the speaker or the hearer. They should never be spoken initially and they should never be spoken in response to an attack. But when they are spoken the hearer should leave the offense on the table and never pick it up.

Never keep score.

The Wall

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

1. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not lest you be judged"

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

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The wall is a mixture of coins of offense, justifications and counter-criticisms. Each counter-action is effective to injure the assaulting party and to bolster self-justification (which is the true strength of the wall.) The past offenses (coins) are the tips of the arrows that are fired back at the assaulting party. Insults are available in the event that the supply of coins is exhausted. Sometimes the wall is loud and sometimes it is quiet, but every time its purpose is to protect the defending party from criticism and condemnation and to preserve self-image.

Without criticism and condemnation, there is no reason for the wall. Hence, the Holy Spirit has provided us with Matthew 6:14 and 7:1 which forbid criticism and condemnation command total forgiveness.

The tragedy of the wall is that it is very effective. Not only does it block out unnecessary, destructive criticism and condemnation, but it also blocks out all perceived threats as well—including well-intended reproof. The wall of defense stops everything, good and bad.

The wall is destructive to the person who uses it because it protects him from considering his own failings and enables him to construct a perception of himself that is not grounded in reality. His self-perception can become, if you will, a bubble. The more the bubble is inflated, the more vulnerable it becomes. And the more vulnerable it becomes, the stronger the wall has to be to protect it. The stronger the wall becomes, the more well-intended reproof it blocks. And the more effective the wall is, the more freedom the defender has to construct whatever version of vision of himself or herself that appears to be most pleasing.

The wall is like a drug that kills pain. It is good to be pain free, but sometimes pain is good because without pain we would never know there is a problem. It is far wiser to solve the problem than to numb the pain that the problem causes.

If the weakness that is made imperceptible by the wall is sin, the wall is perpetuating sin by “protecting” the defender from repentance and admission of guilt (confession), and confession and repentance is the way we obtain forgiveness and cleansing.

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

3. First John 1:9

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One biblical example of the effect of a wall is found in Second Corinthians 6 and 7. In those chapters certain members of the Corinthian church were protecting themselves from the Apostle Paul.⁴ In all of human history the number of people who had the opportunity to sit down and converse with the Apostle Paul is minuscule. What immense opportunity the people of the Corinthian church had! Sitting under the teaching of Paul the Apostle would have been second only to that of Jesus Christ Himself. But some of those in the Corinthian church missed that opportunity because they were defending themselves from him.

And consider Christ Himself. The leaders in Israel were so adamant to defend themselves from Jesus that they had him killed.

Consider World War II when an entire country was mobilized to protect itself from the Jewish people. Reason is not always an element of the wall of defense.

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

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

Humility

Humility is the antidote to the natural tendency to construct the wall. Humility, at its core, is self-respect and respect for others. It fosters clarity of understanding and accuracy of perception.⁵ The wall of defense protects the weak person who must rely upon self-deceptions to obtain emotional equanimity.

4. Second Corinthians 7:2 "Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one..."

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

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Humility is doctrine of spiritual strength. It is the opposite of the wall of defense. Humility is the place of accurate self-perception. When we arrive at humility, piercing words do not pierce because we are resting our self-respect upon reality. If the piercing words are accurate, the humble person will benefit from them because they disclose a weak point. If the piercing words are inaccurate, the humble person will still benefit from them because they express someone's opinion. Humility is a win-win.

Humility always recognizes that there may be some truth in what is being said, even if it is said in malice. Humility takes no offense because it has no edifice of pride to protect. Instead, it receives all that has been said with open minded care and quietly accepts that part that is perceptive and politely ignores that part that is mistaken and has the wisdom to tell the difference.

Reproof is valuable. And there are not many people who are willing to give it because it is far safer to simply ignore a destructive trait of someone else—unless one has to live with it. A destructive trait in someone is like bad breath. The wall of the defensive person prevents him from knowing about it.



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Chapter 9

The Miracle

TRUE LOVE CAN BE RESTORED

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

With this understanding comes the belief that when love departs, the marriage has passed the point of no return. This conclusion is tantamount to believing that God has created the stability of the family to turn on the whim of an emotion over which we have little control. This is simply not the case. We are His children and we have been created to be at peace and to enjoy the life that He has given. Our families and our happiness do not rest upon whims. They rest upon righteousness.

God never intended us to pretend. Nor does He intend us to simply endure. His intention is to restore the love that was lost and to create a new, deeper love. God is fully aware that only true love can support a marriage as He intended it.

With the power of the living God, there is never a point of no return in a marriage because God is able to restore the original love. He *is* love¹ so when His presence returns His love returns as well. And nowhere is the presence of God more evident than when it manifests itself in the resurrection of a dead love or the creation of a new one.

In order to restore a lost love, one must first look at where it went and why. As we have seen, God's presence brings love and sin inhibits it. God dwells only with those who keep His word:^{2†}

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

And again:

1. First John 4:8 "...God is love."
2. † This limitation of the presence of God within is not related to salvation because once salvation occurs, it will never be revoked. Instead these two passages refer to the experiential presence and peace of God in this life.
3. John 14:23. This scripture teaches that keeping God's Word is a prerequisite to God's presence.

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

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When we sin, we breach scripture and limit the very Source of agápe (God's love) because when we sin we do not keep His words and we relinquish His presence. This is especially true if our sins are relational sins against love, such as judgment and unforgiveness.

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The Sin of Judgment

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

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The Sin of Unforgiveness

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

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Forgiveness is the knife that cuts away the stuff that kills love. The closer you make the cut, the more you love. One cannot forgive and remain critical at the same time.

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The sins of condemnation and unforgiveness are like burrs on a pair of socks. Once contact with the burr has been made, the burr sticks and will remain until it is removed. The removal is not terribly difficult but it does require one's full attention.

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Two Ways to Restore a Marriage

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There are two ways to restore a marriage. One way is the world's way and the other way is God's way.

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4. John 14:21
5. Matthew 7:1
6. Matthew 6:14,15

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The world's way is to solve the controversies by airing them, unraveling them, assigning fault where appropriate and teaching the parties how to communicate and fight fair and learn to be able to discuss things without arguing. The world's way is justice and a relational skill.

God's way is to supernaturally restore love.

The World's Way

The world's way analyzes the problem, gives the parties an opportunity to vent and state their case. They give their reasons, make their explanations, and tell what they want to see from the other spouse. Each one "states their case" to the other or to a marriage counselor and then there is an effort to understand what has happened and what is currently happening. This is a good thing to the extent that the statements are edifying and the other spouse hears them. This is called reproof. But in the amoral context of the worldly counselor, real biblical reproof is rare and there is little delineation between edifying reproof and destructive criticism.

A counselor listens, calms, reassures, and gives advice and assignments. Communication is taught and practiced if the parties are not communicating effectively. The parties try to understand how and why they arrived to the place where they find themselves. They try to understand why he or she did what they did because with understanding the parties should be able to deal with the problems. Try to stand in the shoes of the other spouse and sympathize and see that the other party is perhaps not really quite as bad as previously thought. The spouses are guided toward the understanding that the goal is not impossible and that each can accommodate the other party. This is certainly a worthy goal.

The world's way treats designations of responsibility and retribution as part of life and an essential for an accurate understanding. It assumes that with understanding and the absence of malice, the parties can move on to better times. The world's way tries to find out what happened and fix it. The goal is to effect some manner of justice and equanimity and agreement between the parties and provide them with relational skills.

The world's way often addresses the most prevalent problem: communication. The parties are taught that words do injure and they do cause defensive responses and counter-accusations. This world's method may even include prayer, but the means for healing is an unscriptural method. In the world's way there is really no scriptural

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application because scripture is not the method. The world's method is derived from man and man's theories. God may be acknowledged, especially if it could help or if the parties are religious, but His actual presence is not recognized. He is essentially irrelevant and He is no more than another method.⁷

The world's teaches that an essential part of marriage is meeting the needs of one's spouse. That is most certainly true, but how? Simple. Just do it! Well, unfortunately, it's not as easy as buying her dinner. The need of a wife is more than dinner. She can pay for her own dinner and her stomach is not what is in need. What is in need is her heart and the food that her heart needs cannot be purchased. It cannot be learned and it cannot be faked. The same is true for her husband. Method is not going to help.

In the world's way sin may be relevant but the sin nature is rarely seen as a root cause and sin is not referred to as "sin" because no one really knows what sin is and it makes people feel bad. References to sin causes guilt and more emotional entanglement, so they are avoided. Unforgiveness and criticism are viewed as inevitable elements of the emotional injury inflicted by someone else. So, the most insidious relational sins have little relevance to the world's counselors. They are just another inevitable part of life.

In order create a foundation for a relationship and to structure the work-out, the parties must be taught how to fight fair. They must be able to engage in normal communication without yelling if they are to continue to live together. They must learn how to fight properly because fighting is inevitable. So they might as well make the best of it.

In the end, all that the world's way can ever do is to encourage people to change behavior because changed behavior is beneficial.

It is difficult, however, to change established behavior by doing little more than eliciting a decision to do so—especially when the deepest and most powerful emotions are moving just below the surface. In a troubled marriage, a change in behavior may appear to be all that is required because the external behavior is what appears to be the problem. But it is not behavior that creates an excellent relationship (or a home). What creates an excellent relationship and a stable home is love.

7. Psalm 50:21 "These things you have done and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you..."

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The world's approach is both rational and admirable, and those who used it are in complete good faith. Even though the world's way is not directed by scripture, its intent is scriptural and all its efforts are good.

The world's way can create a working relationship where strife is minimized and in this way produce a more conducive environment for love and reconciliation, but it cannot create the magic and the power of the original spark. Nor can it erase the injuries of the past or create the sincerity that is essential for true intimacy.

The only deep cure is the return of love and love returns only when sin departs. Love is the only thing that will make a marriage into the absolute beauty that God intends it to be—and God is not limited to marriages where there was once love. Even where the original love was little more than a considered decision or even where there was no original love at all, love can still be created because wherever God goes love goes because God is love.

God's Way

God's way is diametrically backwards from the way of the world. The world's way fixes relationships in order to restore love. God's way restores love in order to fix relationships.

God's way ignores the dark tangle of rights and wrongs and fault is never an issue. He skips over the various methods for restoring harmony and goes directly to the sin.

In every controversy there is an instigator (the one whose sin causes an emotional injury) and there is an injured party. Each spouse is an instigator at one time or another, and each spouse is an injured party at one time or another. The instigator sins when he causes the injury. The injured party sins by taking offense, holding a grudge and failing to forgive and forget. In a marriage the parties may regularly switch roles. Both parties sin as the result of any controversy no matter who caused it. This concept of double sin is irrational in the eyes of the world because the goal of the world is justice and the world sees condemnation as a natural effect of an offense, not as a sin.

The world's way is about respecting rights and boundaries. This means that the verbal expression of anger and dissatisfaction to the other spouse is venting and an essential part of healing. The scriptural way is precisely the opposite. The scriptural way ignores the balance of rights and condemns the sin but not the person who commits the sin. Blame is not a relevant consideration in God's way. The scriptural way

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immediately condemns the relational sins of criticism, unforgiveness and condemnation.^{8†} This specifically prohibits venting and reiteration of past wrongs.

Love (agápe) is patient and kind...is not provoked and does not take in to account a wrong suffered...⁹

The scriptural way ignores the history of grudges, counter-grudges, insults and defenses and all the very excellent reasons to distance ourselves from someone. God's way provides that it is God who does the convicting of sin, not the other spouse, and the means of resolution of internal conflict is pure miracle (God's actual presence), rather than venting.

The Creator is telling us that sin is not just part of the problem; it is the entire problem because love departs with sin and returns with Christ. Method is not the problem. The absence of love is the problem. The absence of Christ is the problem.

When the parties were in love, did they have a problem meeting needs? Did they have trouble communicating? Were they complaining and dissatisfied with each other? Were they unforgiving? Resentful? Condemning? Had they constructed their own silent, separate worlds? No one had to teach them how to communicate, how to want the best for the other or how to speak blessing. They never opened the manual on how to caress or read *Kissing for Dummies*. They needed no instruction in how to look for things in common nor did they need advice on how to stay up half the night talking.

Those things did not cause love. Love caused them. They did them naturally because of love, not vice-versa. Love is the cause, not the result.

Two people fall deeply in love, but the imperfections of each become progressively known and love becomes progressively injured. Insults, slights, grudges, anger and resentments creep in. The honeymoon ends and love seeps out. The marriage becomes a duty and a burden.

8. † The scriptures that teach this are radically different from what most of us perceive as ordinary truth. Because these scripture are so much at odds with what we think we perceive, they would lose credibility if they did not simply work.

9. First Corinthians 13:4,5

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As one man recalled, "I would get home and throw my hat in the door. If it came out again, I would just go back to the office." And a woman recalls, "I would tiptoe around him for fear that I would set him off."

But let's get real. Can God's way really reverse all of this and create a marriage where the honeymoon never ends?

Yes. God does not provide the foundation for a family only to permit it to be dissolved in the normal course of married life. That dissolution can be implemented only by the lovers themselves.

Yes. God's way will restore actual, passionate human love and create harmony.

Don't believe it? Just try it.

We are talking endless love and effortless harmony. Life may remain difficult but relationships become beautiful. This method won't pay anyone's taxes, feed babies or find a job. It is all spiritual. It will certainly impact the physical, but the remedy is spiritual. But we are talking about tapping into a love that is so powerful that it paid the penalty for the sins of the entire world.

We are talking warm and actual, expressed and passionate, beautiful, sensual real human love.

So, how do you get it?

Pretty simple really. But there is a cost. That cost is obedience to God's Word to the letter. The more we surrender our will to His, the more Christ makes Himself known and the more Christ makes Himself known, the more we love. And the more we love, the more we will be loved. It is a spiral going upward. We don't do it. God does it and we cooperate.

We are tapping into a supernatural love, a love that does not die. We are tapping into a love that ignores the past, skips over the disputes, does not hear painful words, cuts through all the reasons and does not care if you are right or if you are wrong. It is a love that changes us on the inside, a love that heals, a love that binds, a love that never remembers and never holds a grudge, a love that never criticizes and always accepts, a love that is new every day, a love that

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never ends, never fades and a love that never fails.¹⁰ We are tapping into God Himself and the instrument that we use to tap into Him is righteousness: scripture.

Don't believe me?

Try it.

Human loves are fragile. Only the supernatural love of Christ is invulnerable and constant. But God makes neither His presence nor His supernatural love (agápe) known to the Christian who continues to sin.¹¹ Hence, the scriptural way is simple. Trust in Christ and turn from sin, especially sins against love (criticism and unforgiveness). That is all that is necessary. It is as simple and as profound as that.

An aggrieved spouse cannot expect love to return if he or she continues to commit relational sins like gossip, verbal abuse, repeated complaining, dissatisfaction, disrespect, deceit, adultery or flirting. These sins *kill the love of the one who commits them first*, then they kill the love of the other spouse. These are overt sins are they must be the first to go.

Relational sins like the critical unaccepting spirit and unforgiveness kill the love of the person who commits them more readily than they kill the love of the person that they are committed against. They are private sins and they kill in silence; they cannot be committed without a consequence. It may well be that no one ever knows when they are committed because they are committed in silence. It is for this reason that they are so destructive. A spouse can do all the right things, say all the right things and carry a burden of critical thoughts and unforgiveness with a smile. But inside love is dying to precisely the same extent as blame is placed on the other spouse. And Satan laughs in silence.

Relational sins are death to love. There two antidotes. The first is Matthew 7:1

"Judge [criticize] not..."

10. See First Corinthians 13

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

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Matthew 7:1 is the ultimate anger management tool because when we are truly yielded to Matthew 7:1, there is simply no reason to get angry. It is like finding the pearl of great price.^{12†} Matthew 7:1 is the key to a life that is free of the burdens of condemnation, fault finding, criticism and judgment.

Matthew 7:1 is the ultimate relationship tool. It removes the effect of current wrongs and old resentments fade in the brilliance of its light. Forgiveness shines like the sun. And forgiveness is freedom.

Matthew 7:1 is the ultimate friendship tool. It takes away the effect of slights and insults and opens up the relationship to a new day.

Matthew 7:1 is the ultimate lover. It takes the grit out of the chemistry and it keeps it bright and warm.

The second antidote is Matthew 6:14,15:

For 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.

These two scriptures forbid the critical spirit, condemnation and unforgiveness. They are like magic pills to be taken when needed with no limitation on how often. Eat them like popcorn. Results are guaranteed. But memorizing them or debating whether they really do what they claim to do does nothing. They are made to be consumed and the proof of their power is in their results. They are like the love that God gives. It is given to be given away.

Far more than we know rests upon the sanctity and continuity of marriage. Consider how immensely important your marriage is to your children. The equanimity of the lives of your children and their future rests far more on the stability of your marriage than you can ever know—until, of course, it is gone and then it is too late.

Righteousness, forgiveness, acceptance, generosity, expressions of affection and respect have the opposite effect of condemnation and unforgiveness. They increase the love of the person who has them. As

12. Matthew 13:45 " the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. † Although salvation is certainly of inestimable value, salvation is not purchased as the pearl was purchased. Salvation is free. The pearl, however is not free; it has a price. Its price is righteousness and the pearl itself is the experiential presence of Jesus Christ.

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the Christian turns his will toward scripture and looks to his Creator, the old sins subside and the virtues of righteousness begin to bloom in their place. When this happens we must not be slack but diligent to express the beauty of their presence with expressions of the love they bring.

Therefore, the only real cure for a dying marriage is the restoration of love.^{13†} Only love can create this bond. Indeed, love *is* the bond. So, in order to re-create true emotional unity, one must re-acquire true love. And to re-acquire love, we must re-acquire the presence of Christ.

When the bond of love is strong, the deepest emotions can become gentle giants that cover over the destruction caused by the sins of the past. As Peter teaches, "Love covers a multitude of sins."¹⁴ God's way tells us to cover sin with love. The way of the world tells us to blame, condemn and vent the sins of others. What will happen to the words that are said? They can never be unsaid. They can be forgiven and they can be covered, but they can never be recalled. Only Jesus Christ can make a real difference. One cannot un-cook a soup but Jesus can make the words to be irrelevant.

So how can true love be re-acquired? One cannot simply will true love into existence because we have no control over it; we never did. It is outside of ourselves. We know this because God is love and God is outside of ourselves. The secret is to have God in us.

In order to acquire true love, we must go to God. Because God is the source of love. God is agápe¹⁵ and agápe is the unfailing¹⁶ power and healing to all the loves, including eros, because agápe is totally unconditional and it simply never fails.¹⁷ Agápe is endless love.

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

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

15. First John 4:8 "God is [agápe]"

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

17. First Corinthians 13:7 "[Agápe] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Agápe never fails..."

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The Restoration

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Relinquishing relational sin can turn love back on like turning on a spigot.

Try it. Cease all relational sin; cease all criticism and all unforgiveness, either internal or external. Confess them all as sin to God and to your spouse and cease all blame and totally accept your spouse without reservation of any kind and with all of his or her shortcomings, faults and sin. This includes the immediate cessation of all flirting, gossiping, insulting, criticism, condemning, complaining, judging, responding when injured, defending, blaming and the total release of all resentment and remembrance of past wrongs.

This may appear to be overwhelming, so the inclination will be to do it incrementally because it is too much to do all at once. But that way will not work. The trick is to do it all at once but for a limited period of time. Because once it has been fully done, even only for an hour, during that time there is no sin, no blame, no condemnation, no criticism and it is the absence of these things that opens the door to Christ.

Addressing a couple of sins here and a couple there and leaving others does exactly that: it leaves others. But relinquishing them all for a limited time gives you the opportunity to see for yourself what can happen. And it is His full presence that heals. It is His presence that replaces sin with peace. Sincerity is an absolute requirement because sincerity is a foothold for the Holy Spirit.

As a practical matter, sincere repentance will eventually falter, but God looks at the heart and sins that have been sincerely repented but have returned will fall off as one moves closer to Christ. With regard to His presence in us, God is more concerned with our intent not to sin than with the fallacies of our will because eventually righteousness catches up to failures. Indeed, the process of righteousness overcoming sin is what the Christian life is.

Cease all controversies, all negative comments and all criticisms (either overt or internal) until after an agreed time period has elapsed. Commit to love your spouse during that time to the extent that God gives you love to give and relinquish all unforgiveness, condemnation, criticism either internal or external. Set a specific time and place to talk about it after the agreed time has passed and decide if you want to do it again.

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If you sincerely repent of these thing for even a short period of time, you will find in that time a deep beauty, a freedom and a peace that you will not wish to relinquish.

It may seem unusual at first. But you will see love begin to return. When you feel it, grab it, embrace it, enjoy it and give it to your spouse as soon as possible. And see what happens to your relationship.

Make certain that your spouse never has to worry about an adverse or critical thought or word. Give freedom and receive it back again.

Scrupulous obedience to Matthew 7:1 protects the relationship from harm and transforms the one who surrenders to it. Intervening issues disappear and the relationship flourishes. Attitudes and histories move over and make room for Matthew 7:1. Memories and cobwebs fade into the shadows as the light of scripture shows how ugly they really are. Echoes of unfortunate words dissolve at the presence of Christ. Freedom happens and the Christian begins to live and experience what Christ meant when He said "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."^{18†} Freedom comes with righteousness and you can feel it.

The point in time at which we sincerely confess, totally forgive and intend to relinquish sin (repentance) is a point in time at which we have no sin and the door is open to Christ. Sin may well come later, but at the point of confession and repentance we have no unforgiven sin.¹⁹

The key to an excellent marriage is love and "God is love."²⁰ Love is not a skill to be learned, nor is it a method to be applied but is instead it is God's response to our yielding. But God has no timetable.

18. John 8:36 † Consider the spouse who is the victim of adultery. The simply knowledge of that sin is a terrible burden in addition to the pain. The decision (and the power) not to condemn because of it does two things 1) it removes the burden placed on the victim but does not remove the burden placed upon the adulterer; 2) it deprives the adulterer of a forum for self-justification and opens him or her to true conviction of sin. Adultery is a scriptural ground for divorce but it is not a scriptural ground for condemnation because condemnation itself is a sin.

19. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

20. First John 4:8

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The time necessary for restoring love depends on sincerity and surrender, not time. Therefore, with sincerity and total surrender of both parties, God is fully capable of restoring real love *overnight*.



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Chapter 10

Genesis

WHERE IT ALL ORIGINATED

In the midst of the Garden of Eden God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then He commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of it.

Why was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil forbidden? If God wanted to have trees with forbidden fruit, why not have a tree of malice or a tree of deception and forbid man from eating of that fruit? What's wrong with knowing good and evil?

The tree and its fruit was good because all that God created is good.¹ God did not and would not create a tree of malice or deception. The tree that bore the fruit that gave the knowledge of good and evil was a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise.² But God forbade man to eat of the fruit of this tree on pain of death.³ Why?

God did not say that the fruit itself was bad. He said that man would die *as a result* of eating the fruit. "You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die."⁴

The problem was with man, not the fruit. What Eve did not see, and what Satan did not tell her, was that when she and Adam ate the fruit and acquired the knowledge of good and evil, the consequence was potentially disastrous.

Once imperfect man had eaten the fruit and acquired the knowledge of good and evil, he would use it to benefit himself. He would cast imperfect judgment not only on what acts were good or what acts were evil, but also upon the persons doing those acts. And he would use the knowledge of good and evil to justify his own actions and condemn the actions of others.

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

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

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

4. Genesis 3:3

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When two people are doing this, conflict is inevitable and resentment comes easily when the heart is open to the forbidden fruit. The natural man will always elevate himself by finding fault with others.

Indeed, when the knowledge of good and evil (the fallen nature) is combined with the intellect of man, there is practically nothing that man cannot justify in his own mind. History and life is ample witness to this process.

The effect of the fruit was evident immediately after Adam ate it. The first thing that Adam and Eve did was to cover themselves so that who they were could not be seen⁵ and they were afraid.⁶ Then God said to Adam, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”⁷ Adam’s response was to blame both God and his wife rather than take the responsibility himself. “That woman that you gave me, she gave it to me...” (paraphrased).⁸ So right after the fall, man concealed himself (figuratively, his sin). And when he was discovered, he blamed both God and his wife. This is self-serving judgment and condemnation. Not much has changed since then.

The knowledge of good and evil became instilled in Adam and Eve and thereafter to their progeny (us).⁹

The effect of the knowledge of good and evil was to leave man with the capacity to justify wrong choices. We know what is right but our imperfection may render it impossible to comply because the barrier of self-interest and pride will not permit it.¹⁰ The result is exactly as advertised: justification and condemnation and resulting spiritual

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

6. Genesis 3:10 “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden and I was afraid...”

7. Genesis 3:10

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

9. Romans 5:12 “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...”

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

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death.¹¹ Hence the clear statement from the prophet Ezekiel, “The soul that sins shall die.”¹²◇ This is exactly what God had said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die”¹³

Another most lamentable effect is that with the knowledge of good and evil and the heavy propensity to use it to our personal advantage, our judgment is clouded. And even more obscured is the benefit of not responding in kind. The result is that relationship dies to the extent the knowledge of good and evil is utilized for one’s own benefit. Sin kills.

The only permanent answer to this conflict is Christ.¹⁴ Christ is the “antidote” to the original sin. Original sin and its offspring bring spiritual death.¹⁵ Christ brings spiritual life.¹⁶† In Adam all men die and in Christ they are made alive.¹⁷ It is that simple.¹⁸†

It is Christ and only Christ who sets us free from the effect of original sin:

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

12. Ezekiel 18:4◇ Ezekiel is referring to the ultimate end of those whose sins are not forgiven, the eternal physical and spiritual death of the soul.

13. Genesis 3:3

14. Romans 5:19 “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One [Christ], the many will be made righteous.”

15. Jeremiah 2:5 “What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?”

16. Romans 5:21 “As sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”† Righteousness is necessary in order to experience eternal life.

17. First Corinthians 15:22 “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.”

18. First John 5:12 “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”† Note that scripture refers to “the” life. The reason for this is that “the” life is not our (mortal) life; it a different life. It is Christ’s eternal life. And note that this scripture says “He who has the Son has the life.” This is because the eternal life of Christ is something that we have now, in this life. It is not for when we die; it is for now. We can experience the eternal life of Christ now, by trusting in Christ and obeying him (see John 14:21, 23). Should anyone question this, he should simply try it.

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For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.¹⁹

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How does Christ set us free? First, He set us free by paying for the sins (our sins)²⁰ that make us spiritually dead,²¹ And second, by making Himself known to us²² and lending us His Presence.²³ Through Christ we can know God.

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Knowing God provides everything that we need for life and righteousness:

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His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him...²⁴

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His divine power give us the strength to obey His commands. One of those commands is Matthew 7:1.²⁵ Matthew 7:1 strikes at the heart of original sin because it forbids us to judge others. If we do not judge others, then we are not utilizing the knowledge of good and evil for an improper purpose: the condemnation of others.

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For many of us, obedience to this scripture means happiness or unhappiness in this life—spiritual life or spiritual death—because in this scripture, *God gives us the right to determine how God will deal with us*. God will deal with us with the same leniency and acceptance with which we deal with others:

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19. Romans 8:2

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20. First Peter 2:24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” First Corinthians 6:20 “For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

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21. Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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22. 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 disclose Myself to him.”

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

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24. Second Peter 1:3. This scripture should thunder from every pulpit.

25. Matthew 7:1 “Do not judge let 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.”

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...for in the way you judge, you will be judged;
and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.²⁶

Knowing Him²⁷ empowers us to obey Matthew 7:1 and thereby reverse the primary effect of the original sin²⁸ and experience the knowledge of God because it empowers us to define the leniency with which God deals with us.

It is all about knowing Christ. Knowing God is not knowing about Bible study or walking forward or going to church or going to mass or volunteering for church work or giving or praying or tithing. All those things can be ways to know God better but they themselves are not knowing God. Knowing God is knowing God. It is an *experience* that flows from righteousness.²⁹

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?³⁰

To know Christ (which is the same as knowing God), is transforming. The presence of Christ within us transforms us and empowers us to no longer yield to sin. Our life becomes a progressive and willing eradication of sin as we experience His presence and His Life more and more.³¹ We never reach perfection, but we do reach maturity in the Christian life.

God's Purpose in this Arrangement

What is God's purpose in this arrangement? One thing that happens as a result of the fall is that with his imperfect nature, man can love. The fallen nature is necessary for human love because love can exist only if it is freely expressed and it can be freely expressed only if

26. Matthew 7:2

27. See John 14:21, John 17:3

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

29. 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."

30. Second Corinthians 13:5

31. Matthew 5:48 "Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

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the person who expresses it can choose not to express it. True love is affection and it must be voluntary. He who loves must be free not to love. The free choice to love arises from the imperfection of man and the image of God in which he is made.

Another thing that happens as the result of the fall is that man has the option to do right rather than doing wrong; and he has the right and the opportunity not to justify himself, but to instead to look to scripture to define is life rather than to himself. He has the option to choose.

Without an option to be unrighteous, righteous choices are irrelevant. With the knowledge of good and evil, the contrast between the right choice and the wrong choice becomes immensely significant because with the knowledge of good and evil man can justify practically any wrong that he chooses to commit. To make the right choice, man must choose not to justify the wrong choice. Each choice to do right is an independent expression that creates in instance of righteousness.^{32†}

No other created being can do this. It is for man alone and man alone because it is only man who lives in a world in moral free-fall, a world that scrambles for vestiges of truth while embracing perversions of practically everything that God has created. Only in that world can the significant choices be made.³³

That is the reason why we are here³⁴ and eternal life and eternal death are in the balance.

Why is it that Christians obey—or try to obey—scripture? Because they are supposed to? Because the Bible is a book of rules? Or is there another far more profound reason? Christians do not live lifetimes avoiding sin and its counterfeit pleasures simply because they are supposed to. They do so because righteousness is its own reward and righteousness comes from knowing God.

And knowing God comes from obedience to scripture.³⁵

32.† Righteousness is eternal. Psalm 112:3 and 9 “His righteousness endures forever” John 15:16 “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain...” See also First Corinthians 3:12-15.

33. First Peter 1:12 “...things into which angels long to look.”

34. Consider the author’s *A Reason for Adversity* found at biblebooks.co.

35. John 14:21,23

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In Conclusion

Through Christ we can refuse to judge. Through Christ we can refuse to condemn. Through Christ we can choose to forgive. The more we make the choice to forgive and not to criticize and condemn, the more Christ discloses Himself to us.¹ And the more He discloses Himself to us the more we choose not to criticize and condemn. It is a spiral going upward. A man and woman who choose this mutually supportive course find true love and true freedom; they become two lights spinning in the night of a Godless world.

Knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent² is a relationship and relationships are everything. Knowing Him comes with sincere obedience and yieldedness to His word.³ God gives us the power to turn from sin and He provides a solution when we don't. That solution is our confession of sin to Him and His forgiveness.^{4†} He does not require perfection from us. What He requires is sincerity and an upward path toward righteousness.⁵ What he wants is heart. This results in the living Christ disclosing Himself to us.⁶

It is this knowing of Him, His presence within us,⁷ that heals relationships and saves marriages because His presence means "everything [yes, *everything*] pertaining to life and Godliness."⁸ His presence

1. 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."

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

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

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

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

6. John 14:21, cited above

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

8. Second Peter 1:3

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means the presence of His enduring love (agápe) because He *is* agápe.⁹ Agápe heals relationships because agápe is total acceptance and damaged relationships are partial acceptance.

Love is damaged by rejection and restored by acceptance. There are two ways used to restore love. The way of the world and scripture.

The way of the world is to follow original sin to its logical conclusion and structure a work-out of the result based upon on the application of man's knowledge of good and evil and in this way open the way for the restoration of love. That method 1) does not address sin and 2) it cannot restore love because enduring love is supernatural.¹⁰

The world's way seeks to change the method of relating and to learn to deal with anger and resentment in hopes that love will return. The way of scripture is to eradicate both the offending sin and the resulting sins of resentment, criticism and unforgiveness. The removal of these sins restores love. The scriptural method skips over the unraveling of the tangled history of rights and wrongs, and then, by divine act creates love, real love, and uses this love to cover over the multitude of sins¹¹ and create a new relationship that is based upon love.

Love can be turned on and off like water out of a spigot by the sincere obedience or disobedience to Matthew 7:1 because the sins of Matthew 7:1 are sins directly against love.

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

We are stuck in a pit with pain that someone else has caused and we stay there until someone gets us out. That someone is Jesus Christ. But He does not do it by vindicating us. He does it by empowering us to forgive and live a life without condemnation.



9. First John 4:8 "...God is [agápe]"

10. Id.

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

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Knowing God

IT ALL COMES FROM KNOWING HIM

We come to salvation by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin.¹ This is called salvation because it saves us from eternal death. It is a free gift.²

But *knowing* Jesus Christ is different. It is not a free gift. Knowing Christ is an experience that is dependent upon our obedience. We can know Him only by sincerely obeying His commandments³ because obedience means the absence of sin and God does not dwell with sin. We know how to know God because scripture tells us clearly how to know Him.⁴ ♦ Jesus makes Himself known to us when we *yield to Him from the heart*:

He who has My commandments and keeps them
is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will
be loved by My Father, and I will love him and
will disclose Myself to him [make Myself known
to him].⁵ †

1. 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.”

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

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

4. ♦ And in doing so, scripture verifies itself in that the Christian can experience the result of obedience and that result is knowing God.

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

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Jesus makes Himself known to the one who has His commandments and keeps them because it is that person who loves Him. So, we know from the first that knowing God has everything to do with love. The person who loves Jesus expresses this love by obedience.

By this we know that we have come to know
Him, if we keep His commandments.^{6†}

We find the same concept two verses later in John 14:23. That verse speaks not of only knowing Him, but of God dwelling 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 with him.⁷

This verse also shows that love is at the core of having God's Presence with us. It is all about love. It is not a religion. It is a relationship and relationships are all about love.

Knowing Him is to have the experience of having Him disclose Himself to us and make His "abode" with us. This is how we know that we are in Him: we experience His Presence.

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in
us, because He has given us of His Spirit.^{8◇}

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

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we
are children of God...⁹

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

7. John 14:23

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

9. Romans 8:16

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Since the Holy Spirit tells us that we are children of God, in order to be sure, we must examine ourselves. We must look inside of ourselves spiritually and see if Jesus Christ is there.

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?^{10†}

So the Bible is all about knowing God. If you, dear reader, do not have an experiential relationship with Jesus Christ, you have something wonderful in store for you. Decide now that you will sincerely surrender to the commands of scripture and discover the Presence of God.

Knowing God is what being a Christian is. Biblical Christianity is neither doctrine nor religion. It is knowing Jesus Christ. It is not church-work, 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 sincere obedience. So the real test of Christianity is whether Christ is in us and Christ is in us is something that we *experience*.

It is a spiritual love affair. It is knowing God and knowing that you know God. There is no mistaking His presence and His peace.

But, as in a human love affair, there is a cause and effect. Love, consideration, respect, attentiveness, kindness and patience are necessary expressions of love. The same is true with Christ. When we yield to His commands, Christ, who is love incarnate, will live in us. To know Christ is to love because wherever Christ goes He brings love. We receive that love, but we know that this love was not made just to receive. It was also made to give away. And giving it away is one of the great ironies of scripture. The more we give away, the more we have. The more we have the more we want to give it away. It is a spiral going upward.

Decisions to keep His word result in the experiential presence of God. With sincere obedience from the heart, one may live an entire lifetime filled with peace because knowing God brings a peace that

10. 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.

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surpasses all comprehension.¹¹ 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.¹²

The peace of God is embodied in love and realized by obedience. It is a peace that must be experienced to be believed because, exactly as the scripture says, it is beyond our understanding or comprehension.¹³

The Presence of God means the end of emptiness, the end of confusion, the end of unending questions, the end of guilt, the end of self-doubt, the end of wandering and the end of searching. It is knowing God and experiencing His eternal life in this life.¹⁴

The Problem

But there is a problem and that problem is sin. Sin causes disharmony and spiritual death.¹⁵ It is therefore the opposite of God. God brings peace and eternal life sin brings death.

At its core, sin is, at its core a substitute, an adulteration and a lie. God is Truth and Life.¹⁶ Sin is deception and death.¹⁷ Sin is not the way to peace. Christ is the way to peace and to life.

I am the way, the Truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.¹⁸

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

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

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

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

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

16. John 14:6 "I am ...the Truth."

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

18. John 14:6

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Those who do not know Christ are already spiritually dead.¹⁹ And those Christians who continue in sin lose their relationship with Christ and eventually experience life without knowing God, which is the functional equivalent of spiritual death.²⁰

Everyone is spiritually dead without Christ.²¹ Most people who are spiritually dead know it because spiritual death is experiential, just like spiritual life. But those who are spiritually dead believe that their state of existence is unavoidable because they have never known anything else.

Spiritual death has various symptoms. Most people who are spiritually dead feel a void inside of them. The internal void engenders the philosophy of nihilism and an underlying conviction of futility. Those who are spiritually dead have no real peace. Many develop a facade of internal stability but there is no peace. Many do not believe that there is a spiritual anything or even that there is an absolute right and wrong. Many think that Christianity is a belief system. They cannot conceive of the reality of a spiritual relationship with God because they have never experienced it. They believe that since they have not experienced it, it cannot be real. They believe that there is nothing more in life than what they have experienced and they live out their days in a lie, a smile and a silent scream.

But they are mistaken. They can become spiritually alive by trusting in Jesus Christ and by yielding to His Word. But many do not even try.

Becoming spiritually alive after being spiritually dead is as if one had never been alive before. That is the reason that the Bible refers to salvation as being “born again.”²²

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

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

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

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

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The way to become spiritually alive is first to trust in Jesus Christ and then, after trusting in Him, to surrender to Him and obey Him.²³ People who come to Christ get all of their sins forgiven because Christ has already paid the death-penalty for their sin and all they have to do is to trust in Him to have it. It is a gift.

Getting sins forgiven is really important because sin separates us from God. Why? Because sin causes spiritual death. There is a spiritual death penalty for sin.²⁴ Sin is the reason why people are spiritually dead. So you have to get rid of the sin before you can have spiritual life because the penalty for sin is spiritual death.²⁵

Jesus Christ paid that penalty.²⁶ That is the reason why Jesus Christ is so important. If He had not paid the penalty for us, we would be paying our own penalty for sin and that penalty is spiritual death in this life and eternal death after the Judgment.²⁷

In order to pay our penalty, Jesus became sin for us.²⁸ He died in our place and was later resurrected, thereby making us right in the eyes of God in spite of our sins.²⁹ Jesus Christ paid our sin-debt for us because God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son to die in our place so our sins would be forgiven and He could give us eternal life.³⁰ The benefit of His death is a free gift and we can obtain by simply trusting entirely in Him.³¹ This is salvation. It is easy and it costs us nothing because the price for it—our wage of sin—was paid by Christ.^{32†}

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

24. Ezekiel 18:4 “The soul that sins shall die.”

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

26. Romans 4:25 “He was delivered over to death for our sins...”

27. See Revelation 21:8 referring to the “second death.” The soul dies in the second death.

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

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

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

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

32. † If you are not spiritually alive and wish to be, then go someplace where you are alone to pray. In your own words tell Him that you are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all of your sin. That is all you have to do to obtain forgiveness. The amount of faith you need to truly come to Christ

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So there are two lives. One is our mortal life and the other is Christ's eternal life. These two lives are lived simultaneously. Those who do not have mortal life are dead physically. Those who do not have eternal life are dead spiritually.

Knowing the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent is what eternal life is. Knowing God is to experience eternal life—and experience it now, in this life.

This is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ who Thou hast sent.³³

We experience knowing Him when we obey His commands because when we obey we express love to God. And He makes Himself known to us when we do.

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.³⁴

And as we continue to express love to Him by obeying Him, begin to live in His supernatural agápe.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.³⁵

This is called godliness or righteousness and there is no better way to live. And it all comes from knowing Him. Knowing Christ is the key. Knowing Jesus Christ is *everything*.

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him...³⁶



is the amount of faith necessary to ask Him for salvation. That is all. You don't have to believe anything else. You don't even have to be sure that He is really there. All you have to do is ask, but in your asking you must be sincere. Also see *Believe in God* which may be downloaded from BIBLEBOOKS.CO.

33 John 17:3

34 John 14:21

35 John 15:10

36 Second Peter 1:3