

# Endless Love

LOVE THAT NEVER DIES

By,

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**“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”**

Proverbs 23:23

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This book is about saving families

## Preface

This book was written primarily to save families from divorce, both actual and defacto.

The author is a bankruptcy attorney in Dallas, Texas, where he has resided since 1979. He is married and the father of four. He is an ardent student of scripture and has been so since graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1983. His works are free on [WWW.BIBLEBOOKS.CO](http://WWW.BIBLEBOOKS.CO) in electronic format and he publishes a website that argues for creation ex nihilo from the perspective of design in nature. That website is located at [WWW.CREATIONDESIGN.ORG](http://WWW.CREATIONDESIGN.ORG).

Although we become righteous in Christ simply by trusting (believing) in Him,<sup>1</sup> there can be a lifetime between the day we trust Him and the day we meet Him face to face. And knowing Him in this life depends upon how we live it.<sup>2</sup> It is here, in this lifetime, that the dynamics of scripture, especially two particular scriptures, arise in the context of human relationships.

Those scriptures<sup>3</sup> forbid criticism and unforgiveness because criticism and unforgiveness kill relationships and kill marriages. They kill families and they damage children. Unfortunately, the cessation of criticism and unforgiveness by simple force of will provides only a temporary peace in a fractured marriage. It cannot restore love, and only love (real, actual and human love) can truly restore a marriage.

This book addresses the restoration of love to a marriage. Although both scripture and the secular world seek to restore love, the restoration of real love can occur only through scripture.

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

2. 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."

3. Matthew 7:1 "Judge not" and Matthew 6:14,15 "If you forgive men for their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your trespasses."

The scriptural explanation of how and why real love can be restored is, on its face, unreasonable and radically impossible. But it is neither unreasonable nor impossible. It is real. It is powerful. And it really works.

Secular counsellors teach couples to comply with various methods of communication in order to restore equanimity to the marriage. The hope is that love will eventually return. Scripture is precisely the opposite. Scripture restores love *first* and then love restores the marriage. The reason for this is that only real, actual, warm, experiential, physical, passionate human love can make the marriage what God intends it to be. Love is the *means* in scripture, not the goal. The goal is the relationship.

So how can love that has been effectively dead for months or even years be restored? It requires a genuine miracle. This book is about that miracle.

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

Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.  
Dallas, Texas 2023

## Chapter 1

### What is Love?

#### HOW CAN WE DEFINE LOVE?

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. It comes sweeping into life on wings of ecstasy and touches every part of us. It is outside of ourselves to be sure, but what is it?

Love assures us that it will last forever, but sometimes it can hardly survive past the honeymoon. It has the strength to establish a dynasty but washes away like a castle in the sand. What irony it is that God would create such beauty and lead us to stake our future and our children's future upon it only to see it disappear when we need it most.

What is this love and how can we unwind it from a thousand critical words and pull it back before it is gone? And how can we do this when we could not create it in the first place?

Scripture tells us that God is love.<sup>1</sup> If so, then God must figure into human love somehow. But God is often distant when needed most, and resurrecting a dead love or saving a dying one would take more than just believing in God. It would take a true miracle.

This book is about that miracle, a miracle that brings actual, passionate human love back from the grip of emotional death. It is about a human love that never loses its power and never dies, a love that rescues families from divorce, restores the original spark (or starts a new one) and protects children from imponderable emotional pain.

But first, let us ask what love is. And that is an interesting question because there are four of them.



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

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## Chapter 2

### The Four Loves

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TO WHICH LOVE DOES "LOVE" REFER?

There are, according to biblical Greek, four different loves. But all of them have one thing in common. They are all affection. Love is affection—no more and no less. It is a powerful and magnificent affection to be sure, but that is all it is: *affection*.

The affection called love can be expressed in innumerable ways, but all of them are *expressions* of love; they are not love itself. They are all the *result* of love. For instance, love creates the desire to give, to forgive, to trust and to help, to sacrifice and to take a chance, but those things are not love. They are the *expressions of love, the results of love*. They are what we do because of love, not love itself.

Many have spent lifetimes searching for true romantic love, hoping for it, praying for it, but in the end concluding that it is nothing but a dream-swirl of some metaphysical eroticism hatched by desire. But they are wrong. Love is very real and it is magnificent and it is powerful.

The trouble is we can't just conjure up love when we want to. It is outside of ourselves. And it has a mind of its own.

When we love, things like kindness, acceptance and duties that we owe to others become expressions love. They flow naturally. We do them because we want to, not because we have to. We do them because love presses us for expression. There is no duty in love; only expression.

Duty gives structure to the expressions of love. But when love is present, duties become the means of the expression of love and the dutiful response becomes the desired response. The result is the same (whether we act out of duty or out of love), but when love is present, duty ceases to be duty and becomes an opportunity to express love.

There are four different kinds of love in biblical Greek, but in English, all four are translated "love" or sometimes "charity" (in King James Bibles). So, when the English reader reads "love" or "charity" in

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the English Bible, he does not know which love he is reading about. We must therefore differentiate between these four loves because lumping them together dilutes their meanings.

The first of the four loves is the love of family. The Greek word for family love 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 “philía” (“fill ay yah”). The name “Philadelphia” comes from this word. 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 the “chemistry” between two lovers. Although eros is translated “love” exactly like the other loves, it is clearly different. A son may say to his mother “I love you,” but when he whispers those same words to his bride, he means something entirely different. To his mother, he is saying “I storgé you” (the love of family). But to his bride, he is saying, “I eros you” (the love of lovers). The original Greek makes this distinction clear but the English does not.

The Creator gives a measure of these loves to everyone to be continually expressed within their proper scope. They are a common grace given to all of mankind. They are all beautiful but they are all human. But because they are human, they are both fallible and fickle. They ride the stallion of human emotions and they are no more stable than the humans who carry them. One does not have to live long to discover the profound frailty of humanity and its loves.

### The Fourth Love

But there is a fourth love and the fourth love is the key. It is different from the other three. Each of the other loves is defined by who is loved. But the fourth is not. The fourth love is not defined by its object. The fourth love is love, *period*.

The fourth love is called *ἀγάπη* or “agápe” (“ah gop ay”). Agápe is not bound by human limitations because agápe is supernatural.

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We know that agápe is supernatural because "God is [agápe]"<sup>1†</sup> and God is supernatural.<sup>2</sup> We must go to God to get agápe because agápe comes from God.<sup>3</sup> Although agápe comes from God, we can still experience agápe when we experience God. Agápe is the experiential interface between God and man.

God is [agápe]<sup>4</sup>

This scripture is immensely significant because it is telling us what God *is*, not simply what God does. When we understand who God is, we can understand why He does what He does. When we understand this, we can understand how to acquire the miracle.

One of the things that God does (or did) is to have a human son (Jesus Christ) who gave himself to pay for the sins of man.

God so loved ("agáped") the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life<sup>5</sup>

We see here that God did what He did because He loves us. He has no other motive. God is all about love.

First Corinthians 13 tells us what agápe is. Every time First Corinthians 13 says "love" or "charity" in English, it is translating the Greek word "agápe." So, all of First Corinthians 13 is about agápe; it is telling us what agápe does:

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

1. First John 4:8 † In this passage, the Greek word agápe is translated "love" in English Bibles because there is no English word that means agápe.
2. John 4:24 "God is spirit"
3. First John 4:7 "ἀγάπη [agápe] ἐκ [from, from out of] του θεου [God] ἐστιν [is]" or "Agápe is from God."
4. First John 4:8 ""
5. John 3:16

suffered...bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things. Agápe never  
fails.<sup>6</sup>

It would be wonderful, of course, to be loved like that, to have a spouse who never keeps a record of wrongs, never takes into account a wrong suffered, is always accepting and supportive, who loves with a love that never fails.

So, what is the relevance here? Can an impossible, supernatural love revive a romantic, human love? Yes, because loves merge. It is real and you can feel it.



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## 6. First Corinthians 13:4-8

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## Chapter 3

### Loves Merge

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NO LOVE IS AN ISLAND UNTO ITSELF

Loves merge. We have all seen it at one time or another.

For instance, one may love a cousin or a sister or a brother with both the love of friendship and the love of family. When that happens, the love of family ("storgé") merges with the love of friends ("philéa") and the structure of the familial bond takes on the camaraderie of an easy friendship. The bond is now two loves rather than one and the relationship assumes the flexibility of friendship as well as the stability of family. It becomes a stronger love.

The same is true for romantic love ("eros") because eros merges perfectly with all the other loves. Every lover knows that eros needs more than just chemistry. It also needs ordinary good times, laughter and friendship. And when powerful eros merges with friendship, the love between the lovers acquires an overlay of easy freedom as the two loves merge into one—one love with the character of both and a spouse becomes a best friend.

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

Agápe is just as much a love as eros and agápe merges just as easily with the other loves. But when agápe merges with another love, something different occurs because agápe is a supernatural love;<sup>1</sup> it is a love that loves in spite of wrongs. So, rather than instilling the freedom of friendship or the fire of eros, agápe brings a supernatural power to eros, a power to ignore faults and a shield against offenses. The merging of agápe with eros is the miracle that saves the marriage because it brings back real human love. If the original love was lake filled with forgiveness, eros with agápe is an ocean.

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1. First John 1:8 "God is [agápe]"

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Unlike the other three loves, there is neither hesitation nor failing with agápe. Agápe is constant. It bears all things, believes all things and it never fails.<sup>2</sup> It is the power to bear all of the imperfections of a spouse and it does not bow its head when confronted with disappointment. So, to the extent that agápe is present, the human loves take on a strength and continuity that would otherwise be impossible. The great beauty of agápe is that it is the opposite of judgment and dissatisfaction. It brings a deep sense of freedom. It frees us from the burden of blame and condemnation.

Agápe is like a stem cell. It grows into whatever love to which it is attached. When it is attached to philéa, the love of friends, it transforms philéa into a bond of friendship where there is no criticism, no resentment, no judgment and no impediment to acceptance. It provides an environment where both 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 and us to agápe one another.<sup>3</sup>

When agápe is paired with the love of family, it creates a foundation of certainty where history, emotional currents, 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. When agápe merges with eros, it becomes a love that never fails, a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”<sup>4</sup> But it is still eros, so when these two merge you experience something that you can't get anywhere else. You experience holy and physical at the same time.

That's the reason why fornication is a sin. Fornication strips the holy from the physical and leaves you with physical stimulation. Fornication is vapid and empty and the more you do it the more you become what you live.

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

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

4. First Corinthians 13:7

The merging of agápe into a marriage is what makes a committed Christian marriage like nothing else on earth. Agápe in a marriage is *everything*. But how can agape be merged with fornication? It may appear to be but it lasts only for a time.

It is *love*, not relational skill or method that forms the basis for a strong marriage and agápe makes love deep and permanent. Lost love returns with agápe.

### Agápe is the Missing Piece

Agápe is total acceptance in spite of faults. On the outside, one can put up a pretty good show of acceptance for long periods of time. But on the inside, sincere acceptance in the face of inconsideration and other failings can be immensely difficult because the faults of one's spouse damage love and stall relationships. Faults and sin committed by a mate create dissatisfaction, anger and rejection and human love cannot live with these things.

The immediate solution is to either live with dissatisfaction and repressed anger or to correct one's spouse. Indeed, how can our spouse make corrections unless we make our dissatisfactions known? But making dissatisfactions known often results in argument and more distance.

People endure dissatisfaction in this way for years as they move in and out of closeness. It is sad, but what is the practical alternative?

Simply steeling one's self against emotional assault is not the answer because it creates a hardness and it leaves offenses unresolved. One cannot fix the internal conflicts by willing reality away, but on the other hand, life is no pleasure when it is ruined by criticism, condemnation and conflict.

### Methods

When things get bad, the couple may have to admit the need of a third party to fix their relationship, so they go to a marriage counselor. But marriage counselors, for the most part, don't deal in miracles. They are good listeners who have various methods that can strengthen the relationship and hopefully save the marriage.

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For instance, if there is anger in the relationship, we must consider the anger management method. If there are arguments, then we learn to fight fair. If there are misunderstandings or silence, we must implement a better system of communication. Will real love ever return? We certainly hope so, but right now, unless the parties can talk to one another without argument, they won't get anywhere.

On the face of it, this is the best that anyone can do and it really helps because it calms things down. It brings the parties to the table and makes marriages endure longer. It teaches the parties how to deal with major problems. It prolongs their relationship and gives room and time for the relationship to become what it was intended to be. If that is all that the parties want, then they will probably get it if they are sincere and work together with their counselor.

But in the end only love will heal the marriage and method does not create love. How many lessons in communication did the lovers need before they talked into the wee hours of the morning? How many times did they have to read "Caressing for Dummies" before they learned how? How many books on relating did they read before they learned how to relate? Chances are they were enthusiastically relating every chance they got and they never read Caressing for Dummies. That's what love does and that's why they got married. But it is love that does these things, not method.

Method cannot bring back lost love because the relationship is no longer new; it now is has baggage. It is burdened with a history of wrongs, lack of trust and emotional injury. What is done is done and one cannot un-cook a soup.

The scriptural cure is precisely the opposite. With scripture love is not the goal; love is the means. Love is reacquired first and then that love heals the marriage. It's backwards.

Of course, the problem is getting love back into a mess of tangled rights and wrongs and a history of sin, slights, insults, failings and sometimes nothing but pure nasty. Getting love back into that would take a miracle. And that is exactly what happens.

How does it work? It's pretty simple, really. God does it. He skips over the emotional pains, the insults and all the baggage and miraculously restores love. He then uses that love to cover a thousand sins

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and relegates the past to distant memory. It is this love that heals, renews and strengthens. It is this love that brings contentment, trust and happiness.

God does it by means of agápe. He merges agápe with the love of lovers, the love of friends and the love of family and in doing so He creates a love that never dies.

However, before this happens, the lovers have to let Him do it and sometimes that's not so easy.

In order for the miracle to occur, the lovers must acquire agápe and in order to acquire agápe they have to relinquish relational sin because relational sin kills love. But some relational sin is a lifestyle for many and getting rid of it can be difficult. One must therefore understand what is happening and why it is happening before committing to incorporate a radical departure from the norm.



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## Chapter 4

### Relational Sin

#### SIN AGAINST LOVE

**R**elational sin is sin against love. It kills love. It kills families and fractures the lives of children. It is to be avoided at all costs.

There are two types of relational sin. There is external relational sin and there is internal relational sin. External relational sins are overt and obvious to everyone. They are sins like adultery, deceit, insults, gossip and overt emotional injury.

External relational sins have a beginning and they have an end; they have a start and they have a finish. They may be repeated, but they are not continuous. Often, when they become obvious to both parties they can be brought out into the open and addressed. But since they have a start and a finish, they can cease with repentance and be forgiven.

Internal relational are different. They are inward and hidden. They are sins like condemnation, resentment, grudges, unforgiveness and rejection. Internal relational sins are silent. They are ongoing and they accumulate. Internal relational sins kill in the dark.

Internal relational sins are especially destructive because they are responses to emotional injuries inflicted by someone else and they are justified. And because they are justified, they perpetuate themselves. One does not hold a grudge without a reason and the reason is always what someone else did.

Blame and resentment are the natural results of offenses. When someone offends us, it is natural to blame and (therefore) condemn him for doing it. We may respond in anger or frustration or respond with nothing more than a look or we may tuck the offense away and wait to see what happens later. We may ask ourselves, "What kind of person is this? I will wait and see if he or she is as bad as I think." And then we look for a reason and when we look for a reason to condemn we always find it.

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Eventually, a history of offenses becomes etched into our memory and we tag each memory with an opinion. We use these memories to frame our response to the next offense or the next "happening." Conclusions regarding the character of a spouse accumulate. Each one is like a withdrawal from the bank of good will; and when our spouse's account runs low, there is that much less to weigh against the bad.

This is called conditional love because it is love based upon performance. We see this as normal and inevitable. But that is not how Christ sees it. He commands us not to do it. He tells us not to even take the first step toward it: If you never judge your spouse (or anyone else), you will never condemn.<sup>1</sup>

### What is Judgment?

What did Christ mean when He commanded us to

“Judge not”<sup>2</sup>

Judgment in biblical Greek is κρίνω ("krino"), which means to distinguish, categorize, criticize, judge or condemn. Jesus is telling us not to krino other people. We are certainly free to judge the acts that people do, but when it comes to judging the people themselves, Jesus draws the line. The next verse underlines how seriously He takes this command:

Judge not or you will be judged, for in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.<sup>3</sup>

He was telling us not to judge others, ever. The next verse focuses the concept on fault finding and blaming of others.

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

2. Matthew 7:1 NKJV

3. Matthew 7:1,2

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? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye!<sup>4</sup>

Don't be a fault finder or a blamer. Don't be critical. And if you see a speck in someone else's eye and you want to remove it, be careful that you don't have the same problem.

Notice how well the illustration fits. If we are going to remove something from someone else's eye, he will first have to recognize that he has a problem and then, when we try to remove it, we are going to need his full cooperation. It is self-defeating to try to correct someone who is not ready to be corrected. And if we are to speak constructive criticism, we can do so only to a willing ear.

The command not to judge is blanket and all-inclusive. Christ is *not* saying "You can't judge others unless they deserve it" nor is He saying, "It's ok to judge as long as you are careful and accurate in your judgment." He is telling us not to judge anyone ever because we *can't*. He forbids all judgment of others without regard to whether our judgment is justified, normal, natural, inevitable, good, bad or accurate.

Although scripture tells us not to judge others, it also tells us to be wise. It tells us to avoid the company of people who habitually commit sin<sup>5</sup> and to join the company of people who do not.<sup>6</sup> We are to use wisdom to determine the trustworthiness of someone or, in the business world we are to make judgments regarding risk or the wisdom of signing a contract with someone. These are all judgments, but they are judgments of observable acts. For instance, someone may

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4. Matthew 7:3-5

5. First Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

6. Proverbs 13:20 "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

have a history of always paying bills or a history of always complying with contracts. Or if someone may be deceitful or tells lies or gossips, scripture tells us to avoid him.<sup>7</sup> Christ tells us not to judge or condemn the person, but when you see someone committing continuing sin, wisdom says move away.<sup>8</sup> Also, the admonition not to judge the person does not prevent the execution of justice if a crime had been committed. Judge the external nature of a person, but never judge the person.

The judgment of a person is a determination that is reserved for God alone, and then only after a lifetime of history has been re-viewed.<sup>9</sup> It is not for us to judge anyone who is made in the image of God.<sup>10</sup>

### Insults

The concept of being non-judgmental applies when someone insults us. And this can be a serious problem because when someone insults us or hurts us emotionally, our first inclination is to return the favor with vigor and vitriol. But in order to do so we must first judge the one who offended and soundly condemn him. Only then can we feel justified in making an angry response. Without judgment there is neither anger nor retribution.

A classic example is when a father was standing in line with his 4 year old son. The child wandered around and eventually came to two teenage girls who were facing away from him. Before his dad could stop him, he reached up and placed his hand right precisely where

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7. Proverbs 6:16-19 "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers."

8. Proverbs 27:12 "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it."

9. Revelation 20:12 "...the dead were judged from the things written in the books, according to their deeds."

10. James 3:9 "[The tongue is] a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God."

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he should not. The girl reeled around and was very angry. But when she looked down and saw the little boy she laughed and turned back around. The child was very young, so she did not condemn him for what he did. Without condemnation, she had no anger. It was not the offense that made her angry; it was her belief that someone had violated her. When she saw that there was no ill intent, there was no condemnation and no anger. Condemnation always precedes anger.

Our response to an affront may be the same whether we judge or not. But the real difference is not necessarily in how we respond; it is in us. Scripture is not telling us to pretend that the emotional hurt never happened. Nor is scripture telling us that we have to stick around for more insults. We are free to move away from the person who did it or, if necessary, never speak to that person again. So our response may be the same whether we are judgmental or just plain smart.

The difference that Matthew 7:1 makes is in why we do what we do. Christ is not so much concerned with the appropriateness of our response as He is in the reason for our response. Do we do it because we condemn or do we do it because its smart? One is sin and the other is not.

Christ is concerned with why we do what we do because when we obey scripture sincerely, we are within His will and we are enabling Him to make Himself known to us personally.

He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is 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.<sup>11</sup>

What we do with difficult situations and why we do it directly affects our relationship to Christ because Christ will relate to us with the same measure of acceptance that we extend to the person who insulted us.

In the way that you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.<sup>12</sup>

11. John 14:21

12. Matthew 7:2

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Perhaps the most destructive consequence of judging is that the practice of judging forms an incomplete and inaccurate mental image of the person who is being judged. With the image firmly in mind, we then relate to the image that we have painted rather than to the person himself. In a marriage when the parties are painting pictures (images) of each other, they may withhold acceptance at any time simply because they see the picture that they have drawn. Withholding acceptance affects both parties to the relationship and it solidifies the pictures that *both* parties have now painted. When this occurs, distancing is occurring spontaneously.

The trick is to never take offense. If one never judges, one never takes offense.

### A Radical Command

Most people judge others in normal course and condemn when they feel that it is appropriate; so Christ's command not to judge is a significant departure from the norm. Structures of inter-related and inaccurate judgments and presumptions often define the content of crucial relationships, and acceptance can be governed by the whim of current opinion. Jesus Christ became our sin on our behalf<sup>13</sup> and was crucified so that we would not be judged and condemned. He is not pleased with the person who escapes his own judgment but then turns right around and judges others.

This concept is found in the parable of the unjust steward in Matthew 18. In this parable, the master forgave his servant of an impossible debt, but the servant, being forgiven, turned right around and condemned someone who owed him far less. The master heard what happened and referred to the unforgiving servant as “wicked:”

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.<sup>14</sup>

13. Second Corinthians 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

14. Matthew 18:32,33 † This passage does not teach that we can lose our salvation by failing to forgive. It addresses what will happen in this life if we do not forgive.

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In this parable, the person who was prosecuted for the debt actually owed the debt in the same way that those who insult or misuse us "owe" us. Nevertheless, scripture says forgive.

Matthew 7:1 is an anathema to those in bondage to a condemning lifestyle. They live with the burden of an invisible sin and it is so deep, they fear to change it. And, like the unjust servant, the debt is real. But those who choose to follow Christ forgive anyway and discover that complete surrender to Matthew 7:1 results in the dawn of an entirely new spiritual life and a far deeper relationship with God.

For those people, Matthew 7:1 is the key to John 8:36, "If the Son shall set you free you shall be free indeed." Deep internal peace and freedom are the hallmarks of total surrender to Matthew 7:1. One has only to experience it once to decide never to turn back.

As if to underscore its importance, Christ places blessings and curses before us. He tells us that God will relate to us with the same judgment and condemnation with which we relate to others, exactly as the wicked servant in Matthew 18. So, if we are unaccepting and judgmental in the way that we relate to others, Christ will relate to us in the same way.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.<sup>15</sup>

But if we relate to others with acceptance, Jesus is telling us that He will relate to us with that same acceptance. He is telling us that by obeying or disobeying His command, we determine how much we experience the presence of God in our lives. He is saying, in effect, that an injury is an opportunity to become closer to Christ, and the greater the injury the greater the opportunity. He is telling us that it is *we* who determine how close to God we will be and we do so by the amount of unconditional acceptance we extend to others.

This concept (Matthew 7:1-5) fits perfectly with the other seemingly unrelated scriptures. For instance:

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15. Matthew 7:1,2 NKJV

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus<sup>16</sup>

God is [agápe]<sup>17</sup> (agápe is unconditional love, total acceptance with no condemnation)

He who has My commandments and keeps them...I will [agápe] him, and will disclose Myself to him.<sup>18</sup>

### Prejudice

The word prejudice means to "pre-judge." When we pre-judge someone we judge him (evaluate him) based upon characteristics unrelated to his character or his intrinsic value. For instance, we may form an opinion of someone based upon his wealth or social position, or the clothes he wears, his skin color, his genetic origins or any number of things. Judgments based upon these things are called prejudice because they are "pre-judgments" made upon superficial characteristics without looking in to the character of the person.

Matthew 7:1 addresses the practice of prejudice but goes much further. Not only does that scripture forbid prejudice (pre-judging), it forbids all judging, including pre-judging, post-judging, now-and-then-judging, not-so-often judging, good judging, bad judging, smart judging and any other judging. We are not to judge or evaluate the character or worth of anyone. We are to fully accept everyone and, with wisdom, determine the extent of our relationships.

We exercise wisdom based upon the acts that someone does or does not do, but scripture draws a line at that point, a line that stands between wisdom and condemnation.

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16. Romans 8:1

17. First John 4:8

18. John 14:21

## The Image

When you were in love, love was blind and the image of your beloved was unspoiled. So much so that you expected that he or she could do no wrong. Life was beautiful and perhaps that is why you married. You carried an image of your spouse in your mind and whenever you saw your spouse, the image matched the person.

Your spouse was loving and so were you. You both were accepting of one another; you were mutually supportive and concerned for each other's needs. This is human love and it feels like it will last forever.

But eventually your spouse did something that you don't like, or failed to meet a need. You ignored these things at first, but later you began to see the failure of your spouse was neglectful or uncaring. After a while, you decide that the neglect shows a defect and that your spouse is selfish and preoccupied with himself. You begin to see your spouse as a neglectful or selfish *person* and his image changes.

The next time something happens, you say to yourself, "I was right. My spouse is a selfish and inconsiderate person. No wonder we have a hard time getting along. These problems are not my fault." You have now begun to paint the image with brushes of judgment and paints of condemnation. You now *expect* to see instances of selfishness and every instance, no matter how slight, becomes one more element of proof.

You may draw portions of your image from your own justifications that arise from your own sins ("I am justified in rejecting him because he is selfish"). Other evidences of his defective character may come from gossip that you heard.

Slowly, you begin to relate to the image, rather than the person. Your spouse feels it and draws away. This reluctance to be close bolsters your opinion and your image and you are all the more certain.

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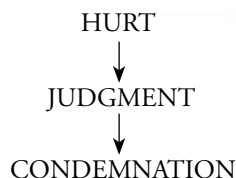
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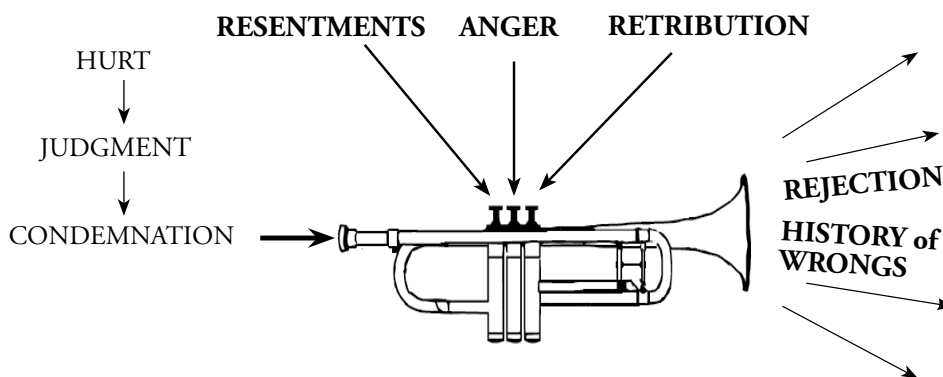


### The Mechanics of Judgment

Like falling dominoes, hurt causes judgment and judgment justifies condemnation.



Although condemnation feels justified (and it may well be justified), the fact that it is justified, does not make it right. Judgment and condemnation is sin whether it is justified or not. And because it is sin, the benefits of avoiding it far outweigh the consequences of committing it. It is very much like a trumpet.



Condemnation is the breath that flows through the trumpet. Condemnation makes the sound and anger plays the tune. The trumpet plays its song of rejection and writes its history of wrongs.

When the parties argue now, each spouse has their own trumpet and each one plays their own critical tune and paints their own image of the other spouse. And now when they argue, each spouse condemns based upon the perception of the image. Once this process begins, it is a downhill slide because each spouse sees the picture that they have painted of the other spouse and uses it to justify every injurious word they say. And each spouse, following his own condemnation, provides a real foundation for the rejection of the other spouse.

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Like a bullfighter coaxing a bull with his cloak, Satan waves false images in front of the spouses and coaxes the confrontation. Satan the accuser,<sup>19</sup> the deceiver,<sup>20</sup> the destroyer<sup>21</sup> is directing this tragedy from the shadows.

The deceived spouses rely on their own judgment. They have never heard of Matthew 7:1 and they think that they are struggling against each other. But this is only partially true.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly [spiritual] places.<sup>22</sup>

### Discussing the Problems

As this scenario is repeated, the possibility of the end of the marriage looms and both parties see it. So what do they do? It's time for discussion. After all, this was once love. What happened?

With distorted images of the other spouse firmly in place, it is time to discuss the relationship like adults. The unspoken orientation of each spouse is this: "I have determined what is right and wrong and I know that the major part, if not all, of the problem is you. My goal is to save the marriage by making you understand how much of a problem you are. Maybe you will reform."

One might as well put two angry children against in room and them pistols. Satan, who is quite real, has won the battle before the first shot is fired.

But, both husband and wife have a lot to lose and the worst thing they can do is to sweep it all under the rug and pretend that the problems do not exist. They have to deal with the problems

19. Revelation 12:10 [Satan is] "the accuser of our brothers and sisters"

20. John 8:44 "he [Satan] is a liar, and the father of it." KJV

21. First Peter 5:8 "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

22. Ephesians 6:12

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head on and dealing with them means talking about them. After all, communication is the cornerstone of a good marriage. They have to communicate and continue to discuss the problems if they are going to solve them. And if they are to solve them all of the relevant history of wrongs must be reviewed, put on the table and dealt with logically and rationally.

Unfortunately, the ensuing discussions do nothing but rehash the same old problems. Predictively, they digress into more exchanges of defenses, judgments and condemnations.

The reality is that telling your spouse clearly and even calmly why he or she is at fault is not going to resolve the matter. Even if you are completely right and your spouse is completely wrong and your spouse admits it, being victorious and silencing your spouse through superior logic (or volume) is not going to bring back love and love is the only cure. Love does not co-exist with criticism, judgment and condemnation. Love is the opposite of those things and those things are continually happening.

So what do we do if we can't discuss it? The trumpets are playing rejection and love is dead or dying. What do we do?

What if we learn to fight fair? Perhaps that would help. But what more is fighting fair than just more fighting?

What about communication? What if we learn how to communicate better? Perhaps if we could learn a different method to communicate we would have a better relationship. Really? Have we forgotten how to communicate? It used to be so easy. But now what do we communicate? Argument and logic? Argument is self-destruction and logic does not help. So what about love? There is no more love to communicate.

Maybe we should try scripture. What about just plain forgiveness and understanding?

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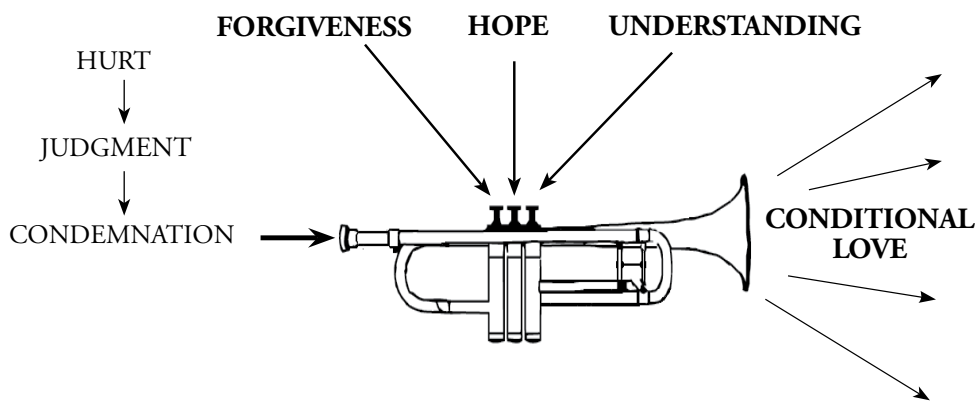
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### Conditional Love

If we can just see that the good points of the other spouse outweigh the bad points, then the relationship would be easier. Perhaps getting away together can restore the good points. Or perhaps we can simply learn to play a different tune.



This is the best that one can hope for without the miracle. Indeed, many, if not most, marriages live with on-and-off conditional love for years. On a good day you can't tell the difference between real agápe (unconditional love) and conditional love (balanced, judgmental acceptance). As long as everybody is happy, everybody is happy. How we got there doesn't matter. Or does it?

Even sincere people make mistakes and mistakes are enlarged by the lens of condemnation. What happens when somebody just gets grumpy or just being plain snarky every once in a while? Or what happens when the judgment of the other spouse becomes less favorable for reasons unknown or when anger gets hold of the trumpet's keys again? And what happens to the past insults and old hurts? Where are they? They are quiet now, but they are still there. They are preserved by conditional love because they have to be. They will be required when the time comes for re-evaluation.

Conditional love is similar to keeping a bank account, except the account does not contain money; it contains favor. It is the remembrance of a good run or perhaps several acts of particularly expensive kindnesses weighed against the current insult. Your spouse is keeping tabs, so keep up the good work.

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The balance in the good-graces account was always in your favor when you were first married because infractions and unintentional insults were rare; and back then your spouse had a different perception of who you are. But each of you are fallible and very human, so there is an inevitable history of failures and a leeway for mistakes. If your account dips into the red then forgiveness does not come as easily as before and when it does come, it is less sincere and perhaps a little fickle. Your spouse is no longer the same person you married—and neither are you. Old injuries can take on a life of their own. Time and history have taken their toll and forgiveness must now be earned. This is conditional love.

### Fundamental Defects of Conditional Love

Conditional love is fundamentally defective for two *really* good reasons.

*First*, by definition, conditional love is judgment of the other party. It asks, "Is the other party still deserving of acceptance?" Hopefully the judgment will be favorable, but even if it is, it is always judgment, your judgment. Judgment of the other spouse is not only unnecessary but none of us is competent to make it. It is reserved for God alone.<sup>23</sup> Those who judge others assume the position and authority of God—and that has been tried before.<sup>24</sup>

*Second*, conditional love always remembers the past. It is based upon remembrance of wrongs. It has to because it uses offenses (both distant and current) to evaluate the other spouse.

But if there is no judgment, there can be no condemnation and no blaming. If there is no blaming, there is no need to determine who is to blame; so, there are no accusations, no assignations of fault, no rejection and *no anger*.

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23. Romans 14:10-13 "Why do you pass judgment on your brother... For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another"

24. Isaiah 14:14 "I [Satan] will be like the most High."

But conditional love is the only way to resolve the outstanding disputes and how else can the failings of our spouse be balanced? Without this, how can we deal with the aftermath of sin and the pain that it caused? It would take a true miracle to unravel a sad and tangled history and even then the parties would still be the same people.

It would take a miracle.

### The Miracle

We are like patients losing our battle with disease but still taking the same old medicine. The answer is a different medicine. Much like the mother who was so frustrated with the disorganization of her silverware, she dumped the whole drawer on the floor and started over.

There is a miracle and it is called agápe and it really works. It comes with the presence of God because God is agápe.

Agápe is beyond us all. It is a miracle drug that is injected into a marriage. It does things that we can't do. It changes us. But to have the miracle, we must take the doctor's needle and that is difficult for some. It can take time.

How we acquire agápe and why it works is one of the most fascinating and rewarding things this author has ever seen.



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## Chapter 5

### Acquiring Agápe

#### THE APEX OF LIFE

True romantic human love, deep and passionate all consuming love is, perhaps, the apex of human life.

But like a diamond, love demonstrates its authenticity by its flaw. Human love is not only flawed, it is incomplete. It is missing something. As we discussed in *The Four Loves* (Chapter 2), there are 4 loves but only 3 of them are given to all mankind. The 4th love is supernatural; it comes with the presence of God and it must be acquired from the presence of God. The 4th love is the key. It is a gift given only to some.

The 4th love is agápe and in order to acquire it, we must go to God because agápe comes from God. Agápe comes from God because God *is* agápe.

God is [agápe]<sup>1†</sup>  
[Agápe] is from God<sup>2</sup>

Agápe comes with the presence of God in us; it comes when God makes Himself known to us in a personal, spiritual way. This is called knowing God. Two steps are necessary to know God.

1. First John 4:8 "God is love." † The word that is translated "love" in English is agápe in the original Greek manuscripts. The reason for this is because English has no single word that means agápe . English lumps all 4 words for love into one. The statement that God is agápe does not mean that agápe is all that He is. He is also the realization of justice and the judge of all humanity. Hence, the necessity for the cross. He is love and He is the Judge and He is changeless (see Hebrews 13:8, Malachi 13:6, James 1:17) and those whom He loves sin (Romans 3:23) and all are therefore deserving of eternal death (Romans 6:23). He must therefore condemn those He loves to death. Rather than do this, He chooses to inflict the death penalty that we deserve upon His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ who is also God (John 8:37). Why does He do this? Because He is love (First John 4:8).

2. First John 4:7

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The first step is to obtain complete forgiveness of all sin (salvation). The second step is to turn from sin and, in the context of marriage, especially the sins of judgment and condemnation.

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## Forgiveness

Step one: forgiveness of all sin. This is surprisingly easy because it is a gift.<sup>3</sup> It is a gift because it has to be a gift. It has to be a gift because if we paid for our own sins we would be dead because the consequence of sin is spiritual death.<sup>4</sup> Hence the immense importance of Jesus Christ. Christ paid for our sins with His own death. He was our substitute. Appendix 5

No church is required to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ. It is free to anyone for the asking.<sup>5</sup> † We have only to trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin to receive it.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God"

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

5. †The whole point of salvation is to be saved from the consequence of our own sin. That consequence is death (Romans 6:3 "The wages of sin is death"). But the death that we are saved from is the second death, not the first (the first death is the death of the body). The second death is eternal physical and spiritual death and it is described in Revelation 21:8. Christ had to die in order to pay our death-penalty. Since the penalty for sin is the second death and since the whole point of salvation is to spare us from that death, we could not pay that penalty ourselves and live. Therefore, salvation in Christ is, and must be, a free gift. But if the penalty for sin is eternal death and Christ did not die eternally. How then did He pay our penalty? He paid our penalty by being killed as our substitute, but He was resurrected after He died because His death paid for the very sins for which He died. Thus, His resurrection demonstrates that His sacrifice was sufficient to pay for the sins of the entire world (First John 2:2 "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.")

6. See Appendix Believe in God - But How for a more in-depth explanation.



But forgiveness of sin is not the same as knowing God and receiving agápe.

### Knowing God

Knowing God and receiving agápe is the second step. To know God is to establish a spiritual connection with God, a spiritual connection that we can experience. Knowing God is not something that you just believe; it is something that you try.

We have to turn from sin in order to know God because sin separates us from God whether we are Christians or not.

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.<sup>7</sup>

God makes Himself known to us when we yield to His will and obey His commands.

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.<sup>8</sup>

The same is true for God's presence within 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.<sup>9</sup>

These scriptures tell us that obedience to His word is how we can know God. We can know God through righteousness; righteousness is God's love language. It is when we speak His love language that God makes himself known to us. God responds to righteousness; He does not respond to sin.

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7. Isaiah 59:2 NKJV

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

9. John 14:23

## Test Your Self

The reality of knowing God (not just knowing about God) is so tangible and so real that Paul makes the presence of Christ the test to make certain that we are truly His:

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:<sup>10</sup>

Note the careful accuracy of this scripture. This scripture says that we can test ourselves to see if we are "of the faith" by looking inside to see if Jesus Christ is in us. This is a spiritual thing. But it does *not* say that if we look and do not find Christ, then we are not of the faith or not saved. It means only that we cannot perceive His presence.

If we cannot perceive His presence within us, but we know that we have trusted in Christ, then something is wrong. And that something is sin. It means that we have permitted sin to come between us and God so that God's presence inside is no longer perceptible and God is no longer disclosing Himself.

Our relationship to God is a spiritual love affair. You have to speak your lover's love language if you want to really communicate. And God's love language is righteousness. If we fail to speak it, He does not respond.

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. I will love him and will disclose Myself to him<sup>11</sup>

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10. Second Corinthians 13:5

11. John 14:21

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SKEPTIC: So, what does that mean for me?

SCRIPTURE: It means that you must turn from sin if you want to know God.

SKEPTIC: Ok. Well, I don't sin and frankly I resent your implication that I do. But even if I did (and I am not admitting it) this whole thing is my spouse's fault. My spouse is selfish and causes me to be angry and unhappy and deserves to hear everything that I say because it's all true. It is my spouse's fault and it is time that you recognize that and stop judging me.

SCRIPTURE: But you do sin. You commit relational sin. You just don't see it because you justify it. It is relational sin that is ruining your marriage.

SKEPTIC: I don't even know what relational sin is but I don't commit it.

SCRIPTURE: Think about this way. Relationships are all about relating and relating is all about communication. There are all kinds of communications. There are words, body language, looks, pauses, inflections, responses, gifts, gestures, touch, caresses, honesty, encouragement, patience, goodness, kindness and others. Love is expressed through all of them. When used properly, these things are the language of love and when love is spoken it is experienced and appreciated. Love has to be *expressed* before it can be received and it has to be expressed in a way that the person who is hearing you understands.

SKEPTIC: Right. But my spouse ...

SCRIPTURE: One thing that is not in anyone's love language is sin. Cheating, lying, anger, personal agenda, rejection, insults, criticisms, condemnations and grudges are not part of anyone's love language. These things are called relational sins because they are sins against relationships. Christ is saying that if you never judge your spouse, you won't commit them—or at least you won't commit

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most of them. These sins injure the love of the person against whom they are committed but they *kill* the love of the person who commits them.

SKEPTIC: Ok. So, its *my* fault my spouse is so nasty! I knew you were going to get around to me. I have to defend myself every step of the way—even against you.

SCRIPTURE: I am scripture and I was written 2000 years before you were born, so if you feel you have to defend yourself against me, you do have a problem. My job is to locate your sin. To do that, I cut deep into who you are and if I am hurting you, you have found your problem.<sup>12</sup> I am like rubbing alcohol on your hands that quickly locates any little cuts you may have.

For instance, if you dislike Matthew 7:1 or feel threatened by it, then Matthew 7:1 is your problem. I suggest that you find a quiet place with your Bible and read Psalm 51 aloud and confess that you have not yielded to Matthew 7:1. Ask forgiveness from God *and* your spouse and cease all judgment and condemnation. With scripture, what you don't want to do is often exactly what you should do. And what you don't want listen to is exactly what you need to hear.

Find the place inside yourself where you need to defend yourself the most. Then look to me and to me alone. Embrace the threats that come from my words and squeeze the blade of Truth. Turn your face from the sins of your spouse, ignore the injuries you have received and turn from all the pain. Now look to me and me alone. Confront your sin with courage and without hesitation and turn from it for no reason other that your Creator commands you to. Ask for forgiveness from your spouse and then sit back and watch what happens to your marriage and to yourself.




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12. Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart."

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We are to refrain from all judgment, but at the same time we are to act with wisdom; and wisdom does not require us to judge or condemn. We are to judge situations, not people. If a person presents a situation that is troublesome, then you may wish to limit your exposure to that person. For instance scripture tells us to avoid bad company,<sup>13</sup> and it tells us not yoke ourselves (like a close relationship or a marriage) with an unbeliever.<sup>14</sup> Don't keep company with fools<sup>15</sup> or with deceitful people.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly or stands in the way of sinners"<sup>17</sup> so stay with the righteous. Judgment is not necessary to be smart. So, be smart, but not judgmental.

Scripture is telling us to act with wisdom and to limit the scope of relationships when it is prudent, but not to limit the acceptance that lies within the scope of that relationship. We are free to draw whatever boundary to the relationship that we wish, big or small; but within that boundary, agápe (complete acceptance) must flow freely. We are to limit relationships but not love.

In short, scripture is telling us to draw circles.

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13. First Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals."

14. 2 Corinthians 6:14 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness."

15. Proverbs 14:7 "Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge."

16. Psalm 26:4,5 "I do not sit with deceitful men, nor will I go with pretenders."

17. Psalm 1:1

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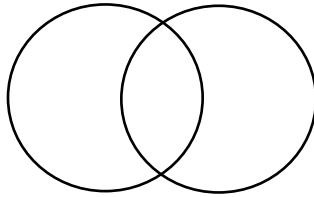
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Circles



Scripture teaches that we are to “agápe one another”<sup>18</sup> and to agápe our enemies.<sup>19</sup> Although the command to “agápe one another” tells us how we are to relate, it does not address the extent of our relationships. It does not tell us how deep the relationship will be or how long it will last. These things are up to us. We determine the boundaries of each relationship based upon our own preferences, circumstance and the wisdom of scripture.

It is generally wise to limit a relationship with someone who is often angry<sup>20</sup> or someone who lies;<sup>21</sup> or especially to cease meeting with someone who continues to gossip (slander), especially if it is about your spouse.<sup>22</sup> It is not a sin to choose not to renew a relationship and it is sometimes wise to end it.

When Scripture tells us to agápe, it is telling us that we are to loving and accepting of everyone within the scope of whatever relationship we have established. For instance, scripture tells us that we are to agápe a homeless man on a street corner, but that expression of

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18. John 13:34 "I am giving you a new commandment, that you [agápe] one another; just as I have [agáped] you, that you also [agápe] one another."

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

20. Proverbs 22:24 "Do not make friends with a person given to anger"

21. Proverbs 101:7 "No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes."

22. Second Timothy 3:5 "For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant ... slanderous [gossips] ... having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. Romans 1:29 "They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers..."

agápe may last for only a few seconds. Scripture tells us to agápe him, but it does not require us to take him to dinner. However, scripture does say that we should buy him a meal if he is hungry.<sup>23</sup> †

Scripture permits each person to set his own boundaries in relationships. 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 draws a circle that deeply intersects the friend's circle. But the other friend may not be ready for a closer relationship (or perhaps simply not have the time for it), so that friend will not draw the same circle.

Everyone has the scriptural freedom to define the extent of the friendship that one is willing to entertain. So, the circle that governs is always the more limiting circle. Healthy friendships are always defined by the limiting circle because it is only within that circle that both friends are comfortable. Conversely, if an existing friendship is too close, we simply draw the intersection smaller until it fits. Indeed, to draw the circle wider than the love that it contains is hypocrisy.

Scripture does not tell us the size of the circle to draw. But it does tell us that within whatever circle we do draw, agápe must flow freely.<sup>24</sup> The circle may be a 5 second exchange with a man on a street corner or a 50 year friendship with a favorite friend. We determine how long love will flow, but we are not allowed to limit its flow.<sup>25</sup> Taken together these scriptures tell us to be non-judgmental, loving, accepting people within the scope of wisdom, righteousness, time and personal preference.

Now we come to the concept of marriage.

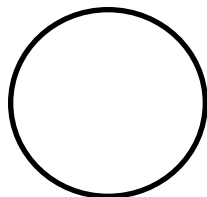
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23. † Make no mistake about it. Feeding the hungry, whether they deserve it or not, is top priority in God's eyes. See Matthew 25:31-46. When this scripture is read with the Parable of Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), it is obvious that generosity to those in need is immensely important to our Creator and we ignore the needs of others at our peril.

24. First John 4:7 "Beloved, let us [agápe] one another."

25. John 13:34 " I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

## The Circle of Marriage



The circle of the scriptural marriage is different, however, because the circles in a Christian marriage are not defined by the husband and wife; they are defined by scripture. Of course, many married couples choose to draw the circle of their marriage to suit their own preferences, and certainly, everyone has this choice.

God has left the choice open to us and we can define our marriage to be whatever we wish. But we cannot re-define what God has defined biblical marriage to be. And it is only in the biblical marriage that we experience God's presence and power.<sup>26†</sup>

If we want the miracle, we have to do it His way. We cannot change the structure that He has established and still enjoy His presence. In the biblical marriage, the circles perfectly coincide, because in the biblical marriage, the husband and the wife become one person, one flesh.

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.<sup>27†</sup>

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26. † However, even in unscriptural marriages, as in life, conforming one's will to God will have an effect.

27. 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.

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This means that if we want a biblical marriage, we don't change the circles; we let the circles change us. We must accept our spouse in spite of everything, in spite of all sin and in spite of all insults, neglects and all offenses. This is what agápe is—unconditional acceptance (love).

Unconditional acceptance can be difficult, but a commitment of this nature is extremely important because it keeps the marriage together in difficult times.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no account of wrongs.<sup>28†</sup>

Without a serious biblical commitment, it is inevitable that one party or the other will eventually re-draw a circle and cause a consistent distancing. In some cases, the circumstances that solidify the family may be little more than verbal agreements or sexual pleasures because love does not last long under those circumstances. Offenses inevitably accumulate and if there is no long term obligation to keep the parties together, the accumulated wrongs are heavy.

Scripture carefully defines the biblical marriage to include lifetime commitments in order to retain stability and peace in the most difficult of circumstances. So, when the thankless demands of children, finances, illness and taxes obscure love, the biblical commitment will carry the marriage over until the parties can get some rest and discover how yielding to scripture will affect their marriage.

The problems that assault love in the normal course of life cannot be defeated by the simple force of will. They are too deep and we are too weak. But God did not create love to die at the hand of circumstance and time. He created it to thrive for a lifetime. But at the same time, He also did not create scripture to be ignored and He intervenes only when we take Him at his word.

This means if we are to experience His best, we must abandon all relational sin, the chief of which is the judgment and condemnation of our spouse. This includes conversations about the defective charac-

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28. First Corinthians 13:4

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ter of our spouse, reiterations of past or present wrongs, evaluations, accusations, anger, venting, rejection and fault-finding. The only exception to this rule would be a frank discussion with a willing ear that does not receive the words as condemnatory. If the other spouse does not have a willing ear, then forcing him to listen is relational sin itself.

### Flow of Judgment

The only effective way to stop the flow of judgment through the marriage is to never permit it to enter in the first place. That is Matthew 7:1. Simply refuse to judge. When that command is respected and obeyed, condemnation never enters the trumpet.

But here is where it gets weird for most people, because Matthew 7:1 prevents our natural response when we suffer an affront. Although an angry response may serve to vent and justify, it is counterproductive. It escalates the dispute and ultimately intensifies the hurt because it adds to the tension and opens the door to re-live past wrongs.

Who among us has not said to himself, "I will not permit myself to be insulted or emotionally injured without responding and equalizing the injury!" Or "Justice must be the hallmark of every good relationship and it is my responsibility to stand for up for it!" Or "I am far more competent than my spouse to make this determination." Or even better, "I would be injuring my spouse and myself by holding this in! (So I am going to injure my spouse for my spouse's benefit)" or "I have to discuss my feelings so be quiet while I condemn you. This will help our marriage." These are not things consistent with Matthew 7:1 - "Judge not."

Thus, for many, Matthew 7:1 is not even on the negotiating table. It goes against what most of us have always believed—and lived. And for many of us, it goes against an established lifestyle. It prevents us from acting on justified anger and prevents a meaningful response. It ignores justice and it is diametrically opposed to practically everything the world teaches about relationships.

It is as if all of reality and relationships were set against just two words. It is as if all of life, all reason, all logic and all that we have lived and learned in lifetimes were cut to pieces by those two impossible, radical words—words that we would ignore if it were not for the fact that they were spoken by Jesus Christ:

Judge not<sup>29</sup>

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29. Matthew 7:1

These words are neither explained nor mitigated nor limited. They come out of nowhere and shift the paradigm of our lives with the flick of Christ's little finger. They flatly forbid *any* judgment of anyone for any reason at any time no matter what. Never judge, never condemn, never, not ever in word or deed or thought. They are simple, unreasonable, impossible words.

But when we take the first step, God empowers us to take the next step and the next<sup>30</sup> and when we yield, He works the miracle.

We don't fix our spouse. We can't. And we don't have to. Instead, we watch Him fix our spouse. All we do is no longer spew out our justified ill feelings. We don't regurgitate past wrongs and we don't tell our spouse how dissatisfied we are. We get out of God's way by making sure that the trumpet is playing non-condemning acceptance.

So, forget about justice. It never belonged to us in the first place.<sup>31</sup> God is saying that none of us is competent to judge the character of another. Only God can judge man. And He does so only after a review of an entire lifetime.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, who are we to judge or condemn anyone made in God's image? That's God's job. And this is especially true for those who have been forgiven by Jesus Christ?<sup>33</sup>†

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30. Second Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

31. Hebrews 10:30 "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.'"

32. Revelation 20:12 "The dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

33. Genesis 1:27 "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them" † The word that is translated man in this verse includes both male and female, two kinds (two sexes) of the same creation.

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SKEPTIC: So what about my hurt! You are saying I just let my spouse hurt me and walk away and I sweep it under the rug and say nothing! I don't think so. That is stupid.

SCRIPTURE: First of all Jesus Christ is not stupid. And second, Christ is saying "Judge not." He is not saying that you can't discuss an emotional injury with your spouse. All He is saying is that you must cease all judgment and condemnation *before* you discuss it. Do you think that would change the tone of the discussion? Do think it would change the outcome? Do you think it would change you? It certainly would. And it will certainly change your spouse.

SKEPTIC: Well then, what about my needs? I have needs too, you know, and my spouse does not meet them. I can't be happy unless my needs are met.

SCRIPTURE: Maybe not. But why are your needs not being met? They are not being met because love has left your marriage. The miracle brings the presence of God and His agápe love into your marriage. And His agápe brings a profound and powerful romantic love back to you and that changes everything. As the miracle occurs, fulfilling your needs cease to be duties to your spouse; they will become opportunities to express agápe and agápe is experienced *by your spouse* when it is expressed. With the presence of God's agápe, your spouse *will begin looking* for ways to meet your needs.

SKEPTIC: OK, so how do *you* respond when your spouse breaks all the rules?

SCRIPTURE: Keep the rules. Don't respond.

SKEPTIC: So what about the past. Is God going to change the past?

SCRIPTURE: No. He is not going to change the past. But He is going to change you and your spouse so drastically that the past will become irrelevant. He skips over the terribles of the present and all the pain; He ignores the blame and accusations and the demands for justice. He jumps over the righteous anger and disregards the old re-

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sentments and then by virtue of divine fiat, He renders them all to be effectively irrelevant, deprives each of you of the satisfaction of victory and gives you Himself.

SKEPTIC: So you are saying that God's going to skip over all the arguments and step in and just do it?

SCRIPTURE: That is exactly what I am saying. The whole thing is very much like salvation. When you are saved, God skips over the judgment of your sin and forgives you and tells you to turn from future sin. You see this and discover that when you turn from sin you establish a relationship with God that far exceeds the things of the world.<sup>34</sup> It's the same with this miracle, except you are the one who is ignoring the judgment and condemnation your spouse demands. Your spouse then discovers that you are *no longer a threat and walls are no longer needed*. Your spouse finds that being with you has become much easier. You have given the gift of freedom

At first, your spouse will await your angry response but it never comes. Your spouse will first conclude you are containing your anger and wait for it to occur, but your anger is not there because anger cannot exist without condemnation.

Your anger never materializes and you have injected an invisible peace into your relationship.

SKEPTIC: You said the gift of freedom?

SCRIPTURE: Yes, freedom. You are giving your spouse the freedom to be himself or herself without worrying about sparking your anger or causing an otherwise unpleasant response. THE key to the miracle is the relinquishment of all judgment, criticism and condemnation in thought, words and deed. That is the only key that will fit that door and you can neither fully understand nor believe what is on the other side until you see it for yourself. You think I am just selling you another method, but I am not. I am talking 100% pure actual miracle that you can experience.

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

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SKEPTIC: But what if I just *can't* believe? What if I have been injured so long and so often that the memories and the visions and the echoes of the past never fade.

SCRIPTURE: I am not saying believe. I am saying try.

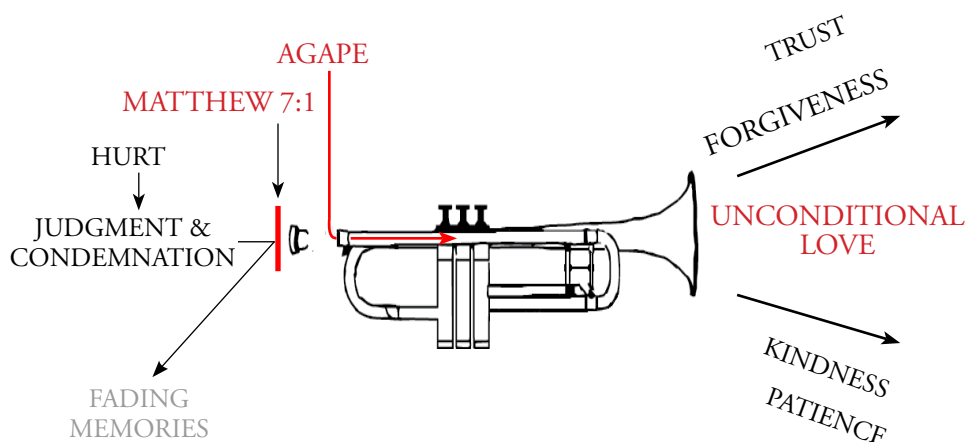
SKEPTIC: I am saying my past is so checkered...

SCRIPTURE: Are you saying that God is not able to overcome your past? You are still thinking in terms of method. Do you think that you are the only person who has ever said that? Or perhaps you are not really willing to relinquish your feelings and let go of your memories and all of your justifications.

SKEPTIC: Right. I have been injured enough. I *can't* be silent.

SCRIPTURE: I understand that you are not willing and that you can't make yourself willing. But are you willing for God to make you willing? But if you are not willing to be made willing, God will not overrule your free will and you will never see the miracle. God will never deprive you of your free will because He made you to have free will. This is your choice entirely.

THIS is what happens:



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## The Mechanics of the Miracle

When we surrender to Him, He comes to us and makes His presence known.<sup>35</sup> His presence brings His agápe into our lives, because agápe is what God is.<sup>36</sup> And God's agápe love becomes the breath that blows through the trumpet and when the breath is agápe, agápe plays its own tune and the other human loves follow.

At this point we are no longer dealing with the question of how we can "calmly discuss" differences and come to an acceptable compromise. We are now dealing with a spiritual power that is beyond ourselves. We are listening to music that we are not playing.

Agápe love is the *only thing* that powerful enough to render the past to be irrelevant and erase the mental image of the other spouse that has been drawn by the history. It is the only force that can pierce the armor of self-justified anger and dispatch the unresolved emotional injuries that are screaming for justice. Agápe and agápe alone can skip over them all, efface the memories and transform the person who caused them.

Insults, slights, and failings and the sad, history of conflict and condemnations roll off the yielded Christian like water off a duck's back.

Matthew 7:1 is the cost of admission; it is the key that opens the door. The reason is simple. Love is the solution and the key to love is the presence of God (because God is love). And the key to the presence of God is to relinquish sin, especially relational sin. God's love-language is righteousness and for relationships, that starts with the relinquishment of all judgment.

New love, young love was strong when it began because there was no history of insults, slights or sin. Both the man and the woman were careful not to offend because their love was such a marvelous experience that both of them did whatever they had to do to perpetuate it. Love was the motivation and the relationship was everything.

---

35. John14:21 "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.

36. First John 4:8 "God is [Agápe]"

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So, they married and expected to enjoy their love for the rest of their lives. But after a while, the toll of sin and human failings took their due. The honeymoon ended and an old Italian proverb proved to be true: "Love makes time pass. Time makes love pass."

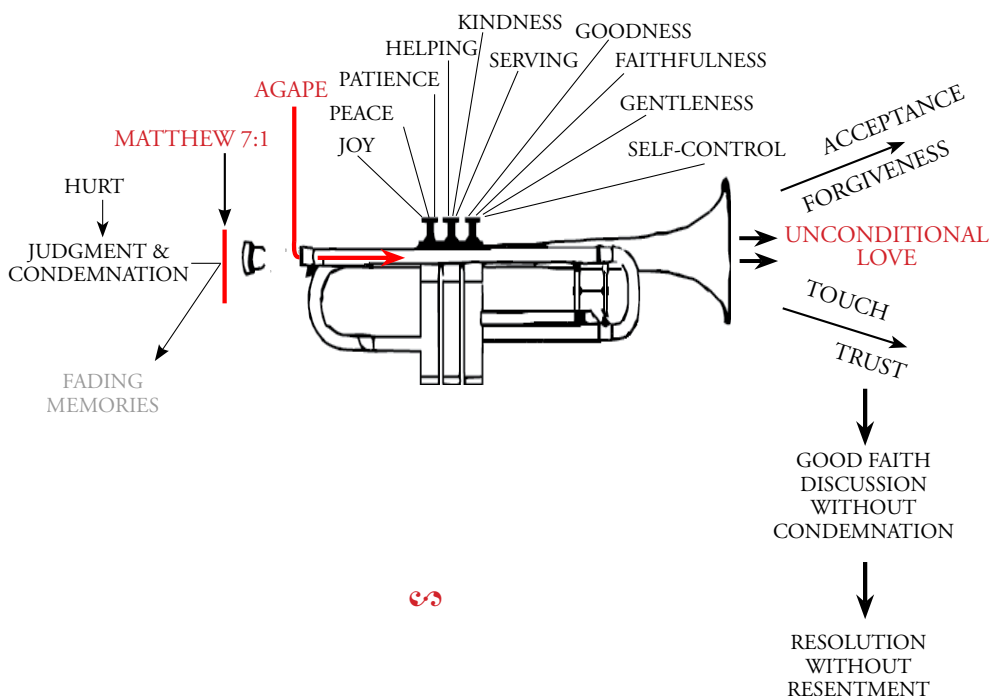
They struggled for a time and did what they were supposed to do but doing it all had become much more of a duty than expressions of love. They tried to fix it but everything they tried was really just warmed over more of the same. They could not rewrite history.

Neither one, believing the bad, could ever begin to trust again. Neither one could ever smile again.

The original love seems lost for good because both of them had now written a history of criticism and condemnation into the heart of the other spouse and painted skewed, unflattering images of each of them into the mind of the other.

It would take a miracle to get love back again but the only way to get the miracle was to obey God's word. This is the miracle.

This is what happens:



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## Chapter 6

### Defensiveness

THE NOVACANE OF LIFE

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. Hence, Christ's command not to judge.

The largest contributor to one's 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 perception that becomes a pillar of the marriage because a righteous, non-judgmental perception is generally a more accurate perception. And it translates into a responsive acceptance and acceptance is the core of unconditional love and love is the core of the marriage.

However, where there is judgment and condemnation, the spouse or the friend who is rejected often constructs a psychological wall to defend his own perception of himself.

Ironically, "Judge Not!" is the very demand made by the defensive person who builds a wall of defense. Both scripture and the defensive person are initially saying the same thing.

But the defensive person goes further. Not only does his wall block out unnecessary, destructive criticism, but it insulates him from all *perceived* threats as well—including well-intended reproof. Like the application of a medicine to numb the skin, the wall of defense numbs everything—the good as well as the bad.

But sometimes pain is good because pain reveals problems.



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The wall is a mixture of a collection of remembered offenses, counter-actions and self-justifications. The past offenses are the tips of the arrows that are fired back at the critical party and insults are available in the event that the supply of past offenses is exhausted. Sometimes the wall is loud and sometimes it is quiet, but its purpose is always to protect the defending party from criticism and condemnation in any form and to preserve self-perception.

The wall is destructive to the person who uses it because it prevents him from seeing his own failings and enables him to construct a world of his own, a separate reality.

His self-perception can become, if you will, a bubble. The more the bubble is inflated, the more easily it can be popped. The larger it becomes, the more vulnerable it becomes and the stronger the wall has to be to protect it.

The wall is like a filter that permits only neuter or gratifying concepts to pass. It numbs sin by providing a wash of self-justification. The stronger the wall becomes, the more well-intended reproof it blocks and the more sin it numbs. Sin that is numbed by justification exhibits no need for confession and repentance. The wall "protects" us from repentance and admission of guilt (confession).

But sin must be repented and confessed before it can be defeated. And we must recognize our sin before we can confess it and repent of it. The wall of defense prevents this and insulates us from the need to repent and confess. It enables us to continue to sin and deny our own failings. Confession is essential to spiritual cleansing and behind the wall our sins are filtered and numbed.

Confession is not necessary when sins have been justified; and confession with justification is not really confession. In order to be cleansed and forgiven, we must sincerely confess without reservation or self-justification. Words alone do not do it. We must do it from the heart.<sup>1</sup>

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Proverbs 23:7 "As he thinks within himself, so he is"

2. 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.<sup>3</sup>

In all of human history the number of people who had the opportunity to sit and listen to and converse with the Apostle Paul is minuscule. What immense opportunity the people of the Corinthian church had! But some of them missed that opportunity because they perceived Paul's teaching as a threat to their own position.

Consider Christ Himself. The leaders in Israel were so adamant to defend themselves from Jesus that they had their own Messiah killed.

Consider World War II. All of Germany was restructured for the purpose of protecting itself from the Jewish people, who were no threat. Truth and reason are not part of the wall of defense.

Consider yourself.

Instead of utilizing confession and forgiveness to deal with sin and to balance the equities in his life, the defensive person uses the wall to avoid seeing personal failings. Bad choice. It is far wiser to listen to critical words in a spirit of humility and wisdom and either accept them or reject them than to fend them off entirely. Well considered criticism can be immensely valuable. One well considered and valuable criticism is the unwelcome but very important observation, "You have bad breath." The defensive person's response may be to simply disbelieve unpleasant observations and continue to make himself unpleasant. What if the statement was "You need to correct your grammar" or "You are talking too much." The same holds true.

The defensive Christian, the walled Christian, is a weak Christian because he cannot permit himself to hear truth. He cannot see his own wall because from behind the wall, the wall is nothing but very reasonable justifications for everything that he does and everything he does is justified. Anyone who questions those justifications is unreasonable.

Perhaps we all have some manner of wall constructed.

---

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

## Humility

Humility is the antidote to the wall. Humility, at its core, is self-respect because it requires (and creates) internal strength and a stable and accurate opinion of one's self. The person who can hear condemnation and accept it for what it is (either true or false) is a person who possesses spiritual strength.<sup>4</sup> That person is a stable person. Spiritual strength and stability are gained by the consistent exercise of humility.

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 accepts that part that is instructive and politely ignores that part that is mistaken. And because its judgment is not clouded by a need to defend, it has the wisdom to tell the difference.

### How to Defeat the Wall

There is only one way to defeat someone's wall of defense. And that way is to render the wall to be unnecessary. This is accomplished by yielding to Matthew 7:1 and refusing to judge or condemn (criticize).

After the wall has been lowered, the defensive person may be amenable to a wholly non-condemnatory discussion. The discussion must be framed in such a way as to avoid the raising of the wall again. This is scriptural confrontation.



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

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## Chapter 7

### Scriptural Confrontation

#### CONFRONTING SOMEONE SCRIPTURALLY

When a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh<sup>1</sup> and the acts and omissions of one have an effect on the other, whether they were intended or not. The consequence of the sin of one spouse will have an effect on the other spouse. 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 relational sins of her husband in silence will grow spiritually, but at the same time her husband is forcing her to be married to a man who is relationally inadequate. The same is true for the husband whose wife commits relational sin. He is forced to live with someone who is relationally incompetent. Defensive walls are one type of relational sin.

Must the neglected spouse remain silent? No, there is no scriptural requirement to remain silent. There is, however, the command not to judge or condemn. Therefore the scriptural confrontation can occur only after the offended spouse has relinquished all judgment and condemnation. After relinquishment of judgment and condemnation if there is still a need to discuss the problems, scripture provides for it. However, when one relinquishes all judgment, the need to confront is significantly reduced and contentment remains despite the absence of the "discussion." Issues that previously would have create a conflict simply dissolve.

But, where confrontation is truly necessary even after the decision not to judge or condemn, scripture provides for it. Matthew 18:15 teaches that scriptural confrontation following an offense that remains an offense is both scriptural and, at times, required.

---

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."

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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.<sup>2</sup>

### The Scriptural Reason for the Confrontation

The biblical approach to confrontation is the opposite of worldly approach. The goal of worldly confrontation is the airing of differences (vindication) and hopefully the correction of behavior. The goal of the scriptural confrontation is neither correction nor vindication but winning back the offending brother. And herein lies another scriptural anomaly. Scripture sees the offensive party as the one at risk, not the one who has been offended. Hence, if one is taking offense he should not confront. The trick is never to take offense. Not taking offense is the key that opens the door.

Why does the biblical approach require us not to take offense? Because taking offense is, in effect, judgment and condemnation.

We find in Matthew 18:15 perhaps the clearest declaration of what God values most and that is love. Love translates into relationships. There is nothing in Matthew 18:15 about justice. Standing up for what is right against a brother's wrong or behavior correction or "speaking the truth in love"<sup>3</sup> or any such thing is found in Matthew 18.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, we find Christ heading straight for the real value: the relationship. Why? Because your brother already knows if he has committed wrong; he does not need to be told.

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2. Matthew 18:15

3. Although the phrase "speaking the truth in love" is in the Bible, it does not refer to confrontation, correction or advice. It refers to the manner in which we are to discuss differences in doctrine. See Ephesians 4:15.

4. Matthew 15:18 is followed by 16 and 17, which are not addressed in this book because they are obviously not intended to address married couples.

Retribution, which is the normal course of the world, is non-existent for the obedient Christian<sup>5</sup> because the obedient Christian does not judge others. And without judgment, one cannot condemn; and when one does not condemn, there is no retribution.

For the committed Christian, mutual acceptance and reconciliation is the goal of the scriptural confrontation and the tool that is used to acquire it is unconditional acceptance. Unconditional acceptance is the foundation from which all biblical relationships flow because unconditional acceptance is what agápe<sup>6</sup> is and agápe is what God is.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew 18:15 tells us the goal of the scriptural confrontation is to win back the very person who has wronged us—and there is not a single word about fairness, justice or behavior correction.

Matthew 18 says nothing of these things because exhortation to confession and apology is the domain of the Holy Spirit, not man.

And He, when He [the Holy Spirit] comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment<sup>8</sup>

Before confronting one must sever one's self from the compelling need for vindication and anger. Otherwise, the confrontation will not be biblical; and if the confrontation is not biblical, one cannot expect any help from the Holy Spirit. And it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, not us. All we can do is accuse; it is the Holy Spirit Who convicts. Anger and retribution do not effect a change in behavior. Only God can change a person on the inside and He won't do it if we are standing in His way.

5. 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.”

6. 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...”

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

8. John 16:8

That is not to say that we should not address sin within the scope of Matthew 18, but it must be done biblically. For instance:

I want to reconcile and forgive and forget. But I cannot do so if you commit adultery.

or

I am having difficulty remaining steadfast and contented when you are drunk.

The response to these must determine if there is a following discussion. If the response opens a door, the go in:

How so?

If the response closes a door don't try to open it:

I only drink to escape from you!

Consider the wisdom of the scriptural approach. It is wholly non-condemnatory. It states a fact, then it relays a personal problem and asks the other party for help. It does not (or should not) trigger the defense mechanism.

The worldly approach, on the other hand, may (depending on your response) easily start an argument. It places the sinning party firmly behind a well established wall of defense that no one can penetrate.

Note the structure of Matthew 18:15. It presumes that it is the offending brother who is the one who is alienated from the relationship, not the one who was injured. This is because sin injures the love of the person who commits it, but only tangentially injures the love of the person who was injured.

Why is this? Because when someone commits an injury, it is he who has committed a sin and thereby separated himself from God.<sup>9</sup> It is he who is the weaker brother and less capable to accomplish a rec-

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9. Isaiah 59:2 "...your wrongdoings have caused a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you"



conciliation. It is he who is engaging in self-justification and blinding himself to his own sin. Hence, scripture places the burden upon the injured party to initiate reconciliation.

It is as if an intruder (sin) comes into a home and runs off with the baby (the relationship). The world screams, "Get the intruder!" Scripture cries, "Get the baby!"

Another reason why scriptural confrontation focuses on re-establishing the relationship is because *it is the relationship that will reform the behavior, not the confrontation*. This is true for spouses as well as children. It's like foreign aid. A good relationship is always easy to like and sad to lose. The relationship itself is the motivation. Hence the biblical approach: Never be a party to sin and never be the accuser of someone else's sin. Why? Because accusing does not work. Love does. And discussion to a willing ear without judgment is love.

Love works when accusation does not because expressing love and acceptance is "expressing" God because God is love.<sup>10</sup> Whereas expressing accusation is "expressing" Satan because Satan is the accuser.<sup>11</sup>

We experience the presence and peace of God when we demonstrate 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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10. First John 4:8 "God is love"

11. Revelation 12:10 " the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night [Satan], has been cast down"

another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love [agápe] for one another.<sup>12</sup>◇

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

It is for this reason that the purpose of the biblical confrontation is to re-establish the relationship; it is not for the purpose of expressing dissatisfaction or to provide an opportunity to vent, complain, accuse or judge. *Justice is not the goal of biblical confrontation.*

So what about continuing sin and offense? As for continuing offense, biblical confrontation states the fact without accusing and without condemnation. And as for sin? It is unscriptural to refuse to relate to someone because he commits sin against you.<sup>13</sup> We are to bless those who curse us and to pray for those who spitefully use us.<sup>14</sup> If the relationship is a friendship, then wisdom may require the believer to limit the relationship. But if the relationship is a marriage, it cannot be limited. We must work within the framework of scripture.

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12. 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.

13. Luke 6:35 "Love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people"

14. 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...."

This is where scripture wipes away the last vestige of retribution and self-assertion and goes directly for the gold—the relationship. Scripture teaches the exact opposite of the world. Confrontation for the purpose of vindication is an exercise in judgment and condemnation and when that happens, the confrontation itself becomes sin.

We are to do what He tells us when everything else is demanding the opposite. We are to love the unlovable, forgive the unjust, disregard our own justice, forget injuries that are impossible to forget and refuse to criticize when criticism is appropriate. This is where we die to self.<sup>15</sup> And this is where we experience the miracle. Everything that we lose when we yield to His command, He makes up with Himself—that is the secret.

For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it;  
but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find  
it.<sup>16</sup>

Concepts such as these are the core of Christianity and spiritual (eternal) life. Perhaps the very best expression of the Christian enigma comes from the writings of Stephen Charnock.

Satan is defeated by the counsels he took to secured his possession, and loses the victory to the same means whereby he thought to preserve it ... Could he imagine that we should be healed by stripes [blood stripes from the whip on Christ's back], quickened [given life] by death, purified by blood, crowned by a cross, advanced to the highest honor by the lowest humility, comforted by sorrows, glorified by disgrace, absolved by condemnation and made rich by poverty ... that the seed of a woman born to a mean [lowly] virgin, brought forth in a stable without any pomp and splendor, passing some time in a carpenter's shop ... and afterwards exposed to a horrible and disgraceful

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15. 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...’”

16. Matthew 16:25

death, should by this way pull down the gates of hell, subvert the kingdom of the devil and be the hammer to break in pieces that power which he [Satan] had so long exercised over the world!<sup>17</sup>

By using the same enigma, you will win by losing, receive by never demanding, overcome injustice by yielding, create beauty from ashes and proclaim truth by silence. God does it; not us.

### The Confrontation

Scripture avoids any specific direction regarding what words should be used when confronting the one who has injured us. All it really does is tell us that our purpose is to re-establish the relationship.<sup>18</sup>

Wisdom and proverbs, however give insight into how to deal with a difficult person.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.<sup>19</sup>

A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.<sup>20</sup>

The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.<sup>21</sup>

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17. Charnock, Stephen, *The Existence and Attributes of God* (originally published in 1797, reprinted by Klock and Klock, Minneapolis Minnesota, 1977), page 323

18. 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.”

19. Proverbs 15:1

20. Proverbs 29:11

21. Proverbs 12:16

The words that we choose for this confrontation must be wholly non-accusatory and they must not be correctional, because correcting words are always critical words to an unwilling ear. Wait, instead, until the wall is lowered and then phrase your issue as a question or a statement of obvious fact (unwilling ears do not reform; they defend).

One 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?” or “Did you really mean to say that?” Or, on a more “place it on the table now” approach, “What was your purpose in saying that?” The goal is to simply ask a question or state a fact that the other party might not perceive.

But remember, we are not really dealing with words and concepts here: it just looks like it. We are dealing with feelings and emotion as—powerful emotions—that no one can fully perceive or understand.

For instance, “I understand that you consider your conversations with so and so to be innocent, but I cannot avoid the pain that it causes me.” This is a non-critical statement of fact.

The entire discussion must not go beyond the willing ear. And when the defensive response comes, *let it alone*. Do not address it further. Non-accusatory words and soft answers<sup>22</sup> that stay within the scriptural parameter will disarm the defensive person and create a common ground for a mutually beneficial discussion. But the discussion can easily turn from a productive discussion to a denial of the obvious. When that happens, it is time to back off and preserve the opportunity to address the matter later if at all.

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

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. It is for this reason that psychiatrists are never accusatory. The same is true for marital counselors. When acceptance comes from the counselor, the walls come down. Acceptance dissolves walls. Soft, non-condemnatory statements defuse the angry response.<sup>23</sup>

The same is true for requests to change behavior. For instance, a simple request such as, "Could you please stop doing that. It would make me feel much better" will obviously have more chance of succeeding than "Can you ever think of anyone but yourself! Stop being so selfish." Who is the sinful person in this instance?

It is the Holy Spirit who has been given the task of convicting people of sin, not us.<sup>24</sup> God does not permit us to be the accuser because we are fallible and just as guilty of sin as the one whom we accuse.<sup>25</sup> † The only real difference between us the other person is that our choice of sin is different from his.<sup>26</sup>

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

24. 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."

25. 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.

26. Romans 3:23 "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

## Not Taking Offense

Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loves it.<sup>27</sup>

Why does God's servant love His word? Not because someone told him to, but because *he has discovered what God's word can do for him.*

It is for these reasons 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 because dust is dirty. 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 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.

Therefore, the spouse of the unrepentant should first take care that he or she has no sin of judgment, condemnation or other relational sin. Then, when appropriate, provide a soft response and simple request. If the injured spouse does not harbor condemnation, the injured spouse will not be angry—hurt to be sure, but not angry because anger requires condemnation.

The other spouse (the spiritually weaker spouse) will vent and condemn. This condemnation (venting) is sin and should be answered with a soft answer and, if appropriate, an apology. If the condemnation does not cease, consider leaving the room rather than perpetuate the sin.

Just as God lives in the praises of His people,<sup>28</sup> He does not live in words that condemn.

It is the Holy Spirit (not us) who must deal with the attributions of fault and the tangled history of injuries and vindication. He takes the failures and the injuries, the violated rights and the just retributions, all the anger and all the hatred, all the conditions and rejections

27. Psalm 119:140

28. Psalm 22:3 "You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel."

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and all the disappointments and rolls them into a ball of old pain and pitches it to the cross. At the cross, the blood of Jesus Christ forgives them all. They become like old ticket stubs in the memory. They show that you were once there but the event is long since over.

The result of refusing to respond in kind to the verbal assaults of a spouse is that the assault goes nowhere and you leave no ill chosen words behind. Time dissolves the effect of the one-sided "quarrel" and makes it far easier for the angry spouse to retract and reform. The one-sided quarrel is like dinner on paper plates and cups. There is nothing to clean up afterwards.

Confronting without offending is difficult, of course, but not impossible. Mole, a character in the *Wind in the Willows* shows us how.



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## Chapter 8

### Confrontation of Mole

#### A CASE OF ACCIDENTAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

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

Mole and Ratty are on a road trip and they may not return for a long time. Mole wants to take a detour to have one last look at his home, but Ratty refuses. Later on Mole dealt with his emotions and confronted Ratty.

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

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

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

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

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

Now consider the same confrontation when relational sin is introduced.

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

It is not difficult to see that Rat would have responded quite differently if Mole had said that. Mole's condemnation and criticism would have placed Rat on the defensive and Rat would have retaliat-

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2. *Wind in the Willows*, page 86

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

ed. Condemnation would have made it impossible for Rat to respond constructively because Rat would have been preoccupied with defending himself. It is only when Ratty *himself* recognizes his selfishness that change can occur and that happens when criticism and condemnation are absent.

If Mole tells rat that he is a pig, he prevents Rat from coming to the same conclusion himself because as soon as the “pig” accusation is made, Rat will begin telling himself why he is not a pig and putting his case together, possibly planning an equally stinging retort. It is only Mole who can enable Rat to re-examine himself and Mole does exactly that when he follows Matthew 7:1.

How would Ratty have responded if Mole had criticized him?

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

Do you feel it? Do you feel the death in those words? It’s there. They are sin and they are death. The heat that rises from an angry response is not the heat of anger. It is the heat from bridges that are burning behind you.

Jesus Christ is telling us, “Just don’t say words like that!” The *words themselves are sin* whether they are true or not makes no difference whatever. Their impact renders self-examination practically impossible. And without self-examination, both repentance and apology are impossible. And it is only with repentance and apology that true reconciliation is possible.

Suppose that Rat and Mole did argue and injure each other and now want to reconcile. What should they do? Should they read books on how to relate or how to fight fair? Should they review the facts again and argue about who was at fault? Perhaps they should go

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back and measure exactly how far off the road Mole wanted Ratty to take him so they could determine whether Ratty should have agreed to do it or Mole should never have asked. Or perhaps they should determine just how selfish Ratty really is? A review of all of Rat's past offenses, perhaps? Why not regurgitate some of the terrible words of the past? Do you think that is going to help? No. More death will not help. All of that is just the same old arguments clothed in different colors. How then can the relationship be mended?

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

7. John 14:21

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

Refusal to judge demonstrates that you value the relationship more than winning an argument. And when both parties understand that about the other party, the battle is won and the war is winding down. Love returns as sin leaves. Love is both the cure and the goal.



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

My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful.<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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




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8. John 14:23

9. John 14:27

10. John 17:3

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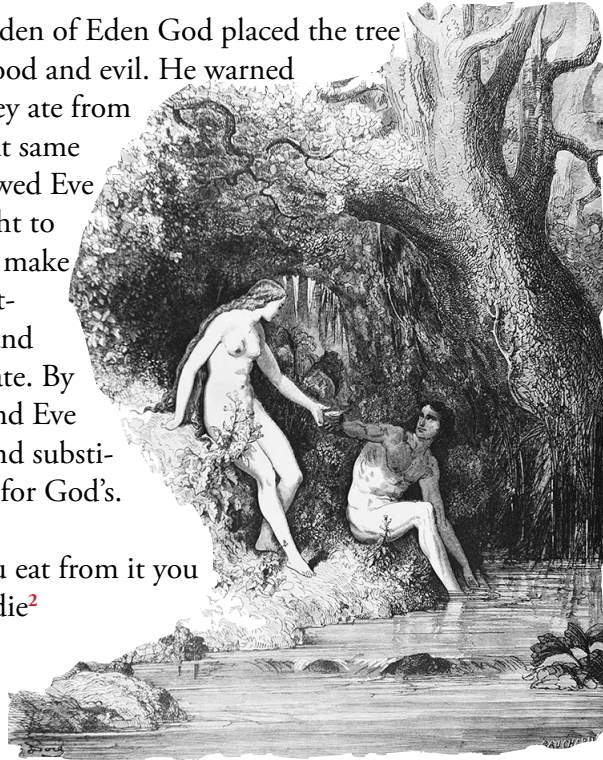
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In the midst of the Garden of Eden God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned Adam and Eve that if they ate from it, they would die on that same day. But the serpent showed Eve that the fruit was a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise.<sup>1</sup> Eve was tempted and she ate the fruit and gave it to Adam and he ate. By eating the fruit, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's word and substituted their own wisdom for God's.

On the day that you eat from it you will surely die<sup>2</sup>

Scripture does not tell us what time of day that Adam and Eve ate the fruit, but it does tell us that God "returned" to the garden in the "cool of the day," which would probably be the late afternoon. If Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the morning, they would have had all day to reflect on what they had done. Perhaps it was as it is depicted in this illustration.<sup>3</sup> They sat on the bank of a stream sharing some water and discussing what they had done.



1. 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."

2. Genesis 2:17

3. Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* (Cassell & Company, London) cir. 1880, illustration by Gustav Doré, at p. 92

One can almost hear Adam say to Eve, "The fruit was delicious. Why was it forbidden?" Eve replies, "Yes, it was delicious and we were supposed to die but we didn't. The serpent said that we would not die and he was right."

Sin beckons until its consequence falls and a cascade of inevitable consequences fell upon mankind on that fateful day—the day we acquired the knowledge of good and evil.

Why? What's wrong with the knowledge of good and evil? Why did God forbid it? And why didn't they die on the day that they ate it as He had promised?

### The Lesson of the Garden

The eating of the forbidden fruit is called the "original sin" because it was the first sin of man. Some theologians look at original sin and conclude that the lesson is simple: God said it; Adam and Eve disobeyed and, because they disobeyed, physical death came to mankind.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, if they had not eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve would have never died and physical death would not have come to mankind.

This is essentially Calvinist theology:

If Adam obeyed, he would live. But he disobeyed and later died and brought sin and death to his posterity (Genesis 2:16,17; Romans 5:12)<sup>5</sup>

However, some theologians see the Calvinist view as a bit short-sighted. After all, the whole narrative revolves around the fruit itself, not death. Perhaps the fact that the fruit imparted the knowledge of good and evil to all of humanity is more important. Perhaps there is more in Genesis 3 than "If they had never disobeyed we would all be immortal."

4. Romans 5:12 "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

5. *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, Daniel C. (Evangelical Press, England, 2019) at page 661. † This book is probably the most comprehensive history of Calvinism ever written.

The Calvinist understanding of original sin points us away from the fruit and treats the knowledge of good and evil as incidental. It teaches that the lesson from the garden is not the fruit, but disobedience. If this is the way that Genesis 2 and 3 should be read, then the fruit could have been anything. And indeed, renaissance artistic depictions of the garden often show Eve eating an apple.

God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit they would die on the very day they ate.

In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.<sup>6</sup>

But they ate the fruit and they did not die. In fact, Adam lived for almost 1000 years after eating the fruit.<sup>7</sup> Calvinism has no explanation for this discrepancy other than to say that "in the day your eat of it" means a millennium. This is not a reasonable conclusion based upon the meaning of the text because the Hebrew text means an actual day much like the English. It means either the daylight of one day or one 24 hour day. God was saying that in the very, actual day that they ate the fruit they would die.

And He emphasized it, "You shall surely die"

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6. Genesis 2:17. Also see

7. Genesis 5:5 "Adam lived a total of 930 years and then he died."

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It is true that Scripture teaches that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years,<sup>8</sup> but the word for day used in Genesis refers to the daylight hours of a day (daytime).<sup>9</sup>

The word “surely” was placed in Genesis 2:17 for the purpose of intensifying God’s threat of certain death, ie. that they would most certainly die on the same day that they ate the fruit.<sup>10</sup>

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

8. Second Peter 3:8 "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."

9. Brown F., Driver S., Briggs C., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1972) s.v. יום "1. day, opp night... Gen.3:8 cool of the day... 2. Day as division of time: a. working day Ex. 20:9,10... b. a day's journey 1K 19:4... c. to denote duration of various other acts or states: seven days Gn 7:4,10... d. day as defined by evening and morning Gn 1:5,8,13,19,23,31... e. day of the month... Gn 7:11... f. Pr 27:15 = rainy day... [etc.] 3. day of Yahweh, chiefly as time of His coming in judgment... 4. Pl. days of any one: a. his life, his age... 5. days: ... a. ...some days, a few days † Gn 27:44 6. יום=time...time of harvest Pr 25:13...proper time for paying wages Dt 24:15... 7. Phrases, without prep. and with, are: a. ...to-day Gn 4:14...yesterday...to-morrow...three days ago...the day of thy going out...since the day when [etc.]. † Thus, the Hebrew word for "day" is used generally as we use "day" eg. "he completed his work in a day." It never refers to eons of time as proposed by evolutionary creationists, nor does it refer to a millennium of time as in the life of Adam. The word יום in Genesis 2:17 refers to either the daylight hours or a 24 hour day; the reference is probably to the former.

10. † See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids Michigan, reprint 1975; originally published 1861) Vol 1, p 85 “Why then did God prohibit man from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the threat that, as soon as he ate thereof he would surely die (the inf. abs. before the finite verb intensifies the latter: *vid. Ewald, §312a*)”

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The Calvinist view teaches that if Adam and Eve had not eaten the fruit then they would never have died and we would all be immortal. But there is no scripture teaching that God created them with eternal physical life. Indeed, scripture teaches that all men are destined to die (at least) once.<sup>11</sup>

Genesis also teaches that there was a tree of life in the garden that gave eternal life, but Adam and Eve did not eat from that tree. In fact, God expelled them from the garden for the express purpose of preventing them from eating from it because if they did they would live forever.

Then the Lord God said, “Behold the man [mankind<sup>12</sup>] has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and live forever — therefore the Lord God sent him [mankind] out of the garden...[and] stationed cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.<sup>13</sup>

The Calvinist view teaches that they would have lived forever anyway. But if this is true, then why did God put a Tree of Life in the garden? What relevance does the tree of life have if Adam and Eve were going to live forever anyway? The fact that God guarded the tree of life in order to prevent man from having eternal life is a clear indication that man would have had to eat from it in order to have eternal life.

Since man did not have eternal life in the first place, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil could not deprive him of it.

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11. Hebrews 9:27 "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment"

12. We read this verse are referring to “mankind” because 1) Adam and Eve were all of mankind at the time and 2) All of mankind were in Adam and Eve, including the effects of the fruit.

13. Genesis 3:22,24

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What then is the alternative view?

What did God mean when He said that Adam and Eve would surely die on the same day that they ate the fruit when they obviously did not?

### What Happened When they Ate the Fruit?

God was not referring to physical death; He was referring to spiritual death. Sin does not cause physical death. Sin causes spiritual death. It causes spiritual death in life and it results in the eternal death of the soul after the judgment (unless one has obtained forgiveness through Jesus Christ).<sup>14</sup> Sin always causes spiritual death<sup>15</sup>† and sin became inevitable when man acquired the knowledge of good and evil.

In Genesis 3 God spells out the penalties for their disobedience, but death is not one of those penalties. Genesis 3 does not include death because death was not a penalty for eating the fruit. It was the consequence. The union of the knowledge of good and evil with imperfect man inevitably resulted in sin because it is used to justify sin and when sin can be justified, it will be committed. And the consequence of sin is death. When Adam and Eve acquired the knowledge of good and evil, they made sin and death inevitable for man *because all sinned*, not because Adam and Eve ate the fruit. Each man or woman must commit his or her own sin before there is any guilt for sin:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned<sup>16</sup>†

14. Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul that sins shall die."

15. † The entire Bible is a warning that sin kills. There are 50 scriptures containing this warning. See the appendix *Fifteen Centuries of Warnings* for a summary. Also see the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*.

16. Romans 5:12

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However, the Calvinist view results in the belief that Adam's guilt is imputed to everyone whether they sin or not. However in Ezekiel 18, God, speaking directly through the prophet, clarifies that there is no imputed sin. Sin kills the soul (Ezekiel 18:4), but one must commit sin first. Romans 5:12 teaches that the knowledge of good and evil resulted in spiritual death for all mankind because all sinned, not because Adam sinned. In addition, the Calvinist view results in the belief God will condemn everyone who did not commit any sin, such as infants and the insane, and cast them into the lake of fire because they are guilty of Adam's sin. Doctrines that have God, who is love, throwing innocent children into the lake of fire because someone else sinned should be carefully reconsidered. Also see Romans 5:13.

The Calvinist view also contradicts the passages that teach that God will judge everyone based upon their own deeds, not the deeds of someone else.

... shall He *not* render to *every* man according to his works?<sup>17</sup>

They were each judged each one according to their works.<sup>18</sup>

...I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct...<sup>19</sup>

God created both the tree and the fruit and all that God created is good,<sup>20</sup> so the fruit itself was good. The fruit did not cause physical death—it was not poisonous. The problem was not with the fruit. The problem was with man.

What Eve did not see, and what Satan did not tell her, was that once imperfect man had acquired the knowledge of good and evil, he would use it to justify his own sin and shift the blame to others. It is

17. Proverbs 24:12

18. Revelation 20:13 “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each on according to his works.”

19. Ezekiel 18:30

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

only with the knowledge of good and evil that we can feel the sting of guilt. And the sting of guilt pushes us to self-deception and shifting the blame.

When man acquired the knowledge of good and evil, he became aware of his own sin. The first thing Adam and Eve did after eating the fruit was to conceal their private parts.

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.<sup>21</sup>

Covering private parts of ourselves exemplifies the effect of the knowledge of good and evil because with the knowledge of good and evil we recognize our own vulnerability. Perhaps our private (sexual) parts signify our greatest vulnerability. When Adam and Eve obtained the knowledge of what is good and what is evil, they hid that part of themselves. They knew that they had sinned and became afraid when they heard God in the garden. They expressed this fear by hiding from Him.

For the first time in history man was experiencing guilt—and he did not like it one bit. They both took immediate steps to mollify or deflect that guilt.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees in the garden.

Then the Lord God called the man, and said “Where are you?”

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

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21. Genesis 3:7

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And [God] said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”<sup>22</sup>

When Adam answered, he did not say "Yes, I ate the fruit." He now had the knowledge of good and evil and he knew he was guilty. He therefore shifted the blame away from himself and pointed it right back at God and the woman that God gave him.

The woman that You gave me, she gave [the fruit] to me and I ate.<sup>23</sup>

Then God then turned to Eve to see what she would say and Eve did the same thing. She blamed the serpent.

The serpent deceived me and I ate.<sup>24</sup>

Both Adam and Eve felt the sting of guilt and they were utilizing their knowledge of good and evil to deflect the guilt for their own sins away from themselves. Adam deflected the guilt by condemning God and Eve. Eve deflected the guilt by condemning Satan. Judgment and condemnation are sin and so was eating the fruit; and sin causes spiritual death. Adam and Eve died spiritually on the same day that they ate the fruit exactly as God had said they would.

### Satan's Method

Satan's attack is three-fold:

1. he questions God's word;
2. he questions God's character;
3. he mixes lies with truth.

The serpent deceived Eve by first questioning God's Word:

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22. Genesis 3:8-11

23. Genesis 3:8-11

24. Genesis 3:13

Has God said, "You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?"<sup>25</sup>

But Eve was too smart to fall for that ploy:

From the fruit of the trees of the Garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat from it or touch it lest you die."<sup>26</sup>

With Eve properly postured, Satan springs the lie that clenched it for her:

You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.<sup>27</sup>

Notice how Satan mixes the lie with truth. It is true that they would become as God<sup>28</sup> and the lie is that they would not die and that God had an ulterior motive. He proceeds subtly, incrementally. He does not disparage God directly, but instead he paints a very human picture of Him, "God knows that in the day that you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." Satan is saying, "God is like you are. And what He says He says because it benefits Him, so it ain't necessarily so." Not much has changed since the garden; and Satan takes people by the hand and leads them down the primrose path.

In our everyday lives, Satan engages in very subtle slander—gossip. Gossip is true slander and it often occurs in discussions about spouses. Wives especially should understand that the gossipy companion who is smiling over a cup of coffee is no friend. Marriages can withstand death, adultery and disease and financial ruin. But they are no match for gossip and commiseration about spouses. In time,

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25. Genesis 3:1

26. Genesis 3:2,3

27. Genesis 3;4,5

28. Genesis 3:22 "Behold, the man has become as one of Us"

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the seeds planted by gossip will bloom like spring briars.<sup>29</sup> The only cure for that poison is adhere to Matthew 7:1 and avoid the gossip companion altogether.

It was the woman whom Satan approached, not the man, and it was the woman who believed Satan's lie. Satan approached the woman because he knew that the weakness of woman is deception. Smart women instinctively recognize this weakness and they learn to be careful—and they stick together.

The man was different. There is no reason to believe that he did not fully understand what he was doing. He was with Eve at the time<sup>30</sup> so he must have seen it all. He watched Satan deceive Eve and he watched Eve eat the fruit. He ate with the full knowledge of what he was doing and said nothing to Eve to dissuade her from eating the fruit. He was fully responsible for what he did and he knew it.

Adam's weakness was not deception. Adam's weakness was woman. Not much has changed since the garden.

Adam's sin was intentional; but Eve's was not. Perhaps it is for this reason that scripture refers to the fall of man as the fall of Adam rather than the fall of Eve or the fall of Adam and Eve.<sup>31</sup>†

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29. Romans 1:29 "...having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, and evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips" First Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals."

30. Genesis 3:6 "...she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate."

31. Romans 5:12 "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned" † This scripture clarifies that the death caused by the sin of Adam spread to all mankind because everybody sins. The death caused by the fall of man is spiritual death that is caused by sin; it is not physical death that is caused by illness or old age (see Romans 6:23).



## Man Has Become Like God

God's statement that man had become like Him by eating the fruit deserves a deep inquiry. This statement is profound and it echoes forward through time until it finds Psalm 82 and it thereafter finds its way to the New Testament.

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil."<sup>32</sup>

Imperfect man had become as God but God would not permit him to live forever in an imperfect state. Therefore, God excluded man from the garden to prevent him from eating from the Tree of Life:

...and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden...<sup>33</sup>

The result of being barred from the Tree of Life was that man, who had now had become like God knowing good and evil would die a mortal death. We see this concept reiterated in Psalm 82.

I said, "You are gods, and all of you are sons of the Most High. Nevertheless you will die like men..."<sup>34</sup>

And we see it again reiterated by Christ as His assertion of deity reaches its climax. This occurred in a confrontation that Christ had with the Pharisees in John 8 through John 10.

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32. Genesis 3:22

33. Genesis 3:22b

34. Psalm 82:6

In John 8, Christ makes the public statement, "Before Abram was born, I am."<sup>35</sup> † Jesus was saying that He existed when Abraham was born and that He is God, because "I am" is the name of God in Hebrew. When the Pharisees heard this they picked up stones to stone him to death for blasphemy.<sup>36</sup> The confrontation culminates in John 10:

JESUS: I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning me?

PHARISEES: For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.

JESUS: Has it not been written in your law, "I said you are gods."<sup>37</sup>

The statement, "I said you are gods" is the culmination of his confrontation with the Pharisees. This statement was far more than a passing shot fired just before Jesus disappeared into the crowd. The statement was a quote, but what was Jesus quoting?

Jesus' statement is word for word from Psalm 82, so most authorities conclude that Jesus was referring to Psalm 82. Psalm 82:6,7 says the following:

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35. John 8:58 "Before Abraham was born I am." † "I am" was and still is the name of God. It is pronounced "Yah weh" in Hebrew and it is the name that God first called Himself (Exodus 3:2), so when Jesus said "Before Abraham was born, I am" He was saying that He existed before Abraham was born and that He is God. Scripture tells us that God consists of three persons in one Spirit: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is called the "God-head." The person of the Son was made into a man and His parents named Him Jesus, which, is a common Hebrew name meaning "Joshua." Jesus was the Jewish Messiah or the "Christ," meaning "the anointed one." Hence, His name "Jesus Christ." So the man Jesus Christ was, and is, God. But for Him to say this outright was blasphemy to the Pharisees and they were going to stone Him to death for saying it.

36. John 10:31 "The Jews took up stones again to stone him.:

37. John 10:32-34

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I said, "You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High. Nevertheless you will die like men, And fall like one of the princes."<sup>38</sup>

But Psalm 82 is a quote as well. What scripture is Psalm 82 quoting? Psalm 82 was referring to Genesis 3:22. There is no other instance in the Bible where God says that man has become as God. This is Genesis 3:22:

Behold man has become as one of Us, knowing good and evil...<sup>39</sup>

So, was Jesus referring to Psalm 82 or to Genesis 3:22? He tells us when He says, "Has it not been written in your law..."

Jesus was not referring to Psalm 82 because the Book of Psalms is not part of the Jewish law. The Jewish law is the Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Jesus was referring to Genesis 3:22.

The quotation marks and commas that we see in English Bibles and other translations are inserted by translators to clarify what they understand scripture to be saying. But there are no quotation marks and commas in the original manuscripts; the original manuscripts don't even have spaces between the words.

Let us look beyond the opinions of the translators and look at John 10:34 with the quotation marks removed:

Has it not been written in your law I said your are gods<sup>40</sup>

Most translations also omit the Greek word ὅτι ("hoti"), which means "that."<sup>41</sup> This word is in the original manuscripts but has been omitted in English translations. Since the translators saw John 10:34 as a quotation, the presence of the Greek "that" was seen as superfluous and omitted to clarify the meaning. This is not unusual

38. Psalm 82:6,7

39. Genesis 3:22a KJV

40. John 10:34

41. † ὅτι is present in the Nestle text, but not the Textus Receptus.

because some Greek words are not necessary to convey the meaning in English. But it makes a big difference in this case. Here is John 10:34 with ὄν inserted:

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you are gods

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If we look further into the Greek, we find that the word that is translated "you are" can also be read as "you are as."<sup>42</sup> If this is the correct reading, then a second rendering of John 10:34 would be:

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Has it not been written in your law that I said  
you are as gods

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This is what God said in Genesis 3:22:

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And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man is be-  
come as one of Us, to know good and evil<sup>43</sup>

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With this understood, when Jesus said "Has it not been written in your law that I said you are [as] gods," He was not quoting scripture, He was repeating what He, Jesus Christ, Himself said in the garden.

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Has it not been written in your law that I said  
you are as gods?

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It was the pre-incarnate Christ, the Creator<sup>44</sup> who said, "the man is become as one of Us." It was Christ Who was walking in the Garden in the cool of the day and it was Christ who warned them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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John 10:34 is a forthright declaration to the Jewish authorities that Christ is God incarnate (God made man), but the Pharisees apparently thought he was simply quoting Psalm 82.

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42. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (Second Ed. 1958, Univ. Of Chicago Press), s.v. εἶμι which is translated "you are" in John 10:34, but may also be translated "you are as."

43. Genesis 3:22a ASV

44. John 1:3

**The Relevance of the Entire Psalm 82**

Psalm 82 (Just 8 verses) effectively describes Christ's confrontation with the Pharisees on that day. This confrontation begins in John 8:12, when Christ initiates it with, "I am the light of the world." It reaches its climax in John 8:58 "Before Abraham was, I am" and it closes with John 10:34 when Christ, speaking to the blind, tells them that it was He Who was in the garden. Here is the entire Psalm 82:

VERSE 1a: "God takes His stand in His own congregation."

The Jewish people are the congregation of the Creator. The Son is the Creator.<sup>45</sup> The Creator has returned to His congregation and He is taking a stand regarding Who He really is.

VERSE 1b: "He judges in the midst of the rulers"

Christ is standing in the midst of the rulers of His congregation and judging them to their face: "For judgment I came into this world."<sup>46</sup>

VERSE 2: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"

Christ is excoriating rulers of the Jews because they are unjust. For instance, they did the following:

They [the parents of the blind man whom Christ healed] were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed, that if anyone should confess Him to be Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue."<sup>47</sup>

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45. Colossians 1:16 "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

46. John 9:39

47. John 9:22

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Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.<sup>48</sup>

VERSE 3: "Vindicate the weak and the fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and the destitute."

VERSE 4: "Rescue the weak and needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked."

VERSES 5a: "They [the Jews] do not know nor do they understand; they walk in about in darkness"

The Pharisees are blind and do not understand who they are or who Christ is:

For judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind<sup>49</sup>

VERSE 5b: "All the foundations of the earth are shaken."

The congregation has rejected its own Messiah and its rulers about to murder Him to protect their own political power. They do not understand that they themselves will soon die and be judged by the same One that they are about to murder. The foundations of the earth are shaken figuratively and later, at the crucifixion, they were shaken in fact by an earthquake. Humanity is approaching the fulcrum of its history: the cross.

The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.<sup>50</sup>

If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?"<sup>51</sup>

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48. Matthew 12:34

49. John 9:39

50. Matthew 27:51

51. Psalm 11:3

VERSE 6: "I said that you are [as] gods and all of you are the sons of the Most High."

This statement is not a quote. It is a restatement of what Christ said in the garden in Genesis 3:22. Man has become like God, knowing good and evil. Therefore, all of mankind are sons of the Most High.

Such is the precious commodity, "The knowledge of good and evil." It causes men to be as gods but they will die as men. It is what separates man from beast.

VERSE 7: "Nevertheless you will die like men, and fall like one of the princes"

As set forth above, Jesus is saying that the Pharisees (who have rejected Him) will die like men. It is appointed unto man to die once.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die,  
but after this the judgment<sup>52</sup>

Jesus is also saying that they will fall like one of the princes. The reference to one of the princes is a reference to Satan, whose title is "The prince and power of the air."<sup>53</sup> Satan will fall into the lake of fire exactly like the unredeemed.<sup>54</sup> However, the unredeemed man will die a second death,<sup>55</sup> whereas Satan is not permitted to die. He will be tormented there

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52. Hebrews 9:27

53. Ephesians 2:1,2 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience

54. Revelation 20:14 "And death and hell were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire."◇ In this verse, Christ is addressing those who reject him (the Pharisees) will die like men (unredeemed men), which means that their soul will die (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). And they will "fall like one of the princes"

55. Revelation 21:8 "...unbelieving...their part will be in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which [referring to their "part"] is the second death."

forever.<sup>56</sup> Hence Verse 7 draws this distinction: Those who reject Him will fall into the lake of fire "like one of the princes" (Satan), but they will not die "like one of the princes" because the Satan will not die. Instead their resurrected body and their soul will die an eternal death in the lake of fire.

Hence, the statement in Hebrews 9:27 that it is appointed unto man to die *once*. All men must die once, but not all men must die twice. Only those who are unredeemed will die twice (first the body dies and then the resurrected body and soul die in the lake of fire).<sup>57</sup>

VERSE 8: "Arise O God, judge the earth! For it is You who possesses the nations."

God (the Trinity) is God of the entire world, not just the God of Israel. And the Second Person of the Trinity (Jesus Christ) will "possess the nations" in the millennium.<sup>58</sup>

### The Practical Effect of the Fruit

After Adam and Eve were expelled, it is reasonable to assume that they took stock of where they were and what had happened. Undoubtedly they discussed it at length.

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56. Revelation 20:10 "And the devil who deceived them was thrown in to the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever."† This is the only scripture that mentions eternal torment and it applies only to Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet. There is no scripture that directly states that unbelievers will suffer the same fate as Satan. On the contrary there are 50 scriptures that say the eternal fate of the unredeemed is death. See the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*.

57. See the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*

58. Revelation 20:6 "They will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years."



It was clear that they could no longer trust Satan because trusting Satan resulted in their expulsion from the garden. But God had told them that they would die on the same day they ate the fruit and they were still alive. So who could they trust? It is not difficult to grasp their final conclusion: they would trust themselves.

Is this not exactly what occurs in the liberal churches of today? They question the Word of God because they do not know God and the Holy Spirit has not witnessed to them regarding the truth of scripture. The first question they ask is this, "Indeed, has God really said..." This Bible is filled with good lessons, they say, but it was written by men, not God, so we decide for ourselves what is good and evil. That is exactly what happened in the garden. Man became fully man on that day and not much has changed since the garden.

The most valuable lesson from the garden is to trust God's word whether we understand it or not—and let the results demonstrate its value and vindicate our trust in it.<sup>59</sup> †

Herein lies the key to an excellent marriage and a peaceful life: Look to the Word of God and grasp it as if your life depended on it because it does. This applies especially to those parts of the Bible that you least want to recognize. This applies to Matthew 7:1. Cease all judgment and watch what happens.

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59. † Verifying the inerrancy of scripture is not difficult and God responds to these efforts. To do so, simply assume that scripture is true until it proves itself to be false. Challenge scripture and it will show itself to be true every time. It will draw you deeper and deeper into personal peace and certainty until what began as a tenuous faith becomes transformed into knowledge.

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The knowledge of good and evil became instilled in Adam and Eve as soon as they ate the fruit and that knowledge was passed on to us.<sup>60</sup> The knowledge of good and evil is therefore a spiritual characteristic, not a physical characteristic.<sup>61</sup>†

Man may know the righteous thing to do, but if his self-interest demands a different choice, he often uses his knowledge of good and evil to justify his own sin, and when the knowledge of good and evil is combined with the intellect of man, there is practically no sin that man cannot justify in his own mind. History is ample witness to this.

The knowledge of good and evil enables man to commit sin and still retain a perception of blamelessness because he justifies his sin. It enables man to sin without perceived guilt. The result is exactly as advertised: spiritual death.<sup>62</sup>

The experience of knowing God is hindered or prevented by the justification of our own sin because sin, even if we justify it, is still sin. And sin kills.<sup>63</sup> Each sin is a piece of spiritual death until it is confessed, apologized and repented. But confession, apology and repentance is not likely when the sin has been justified. The justification of sin removes the need of apology and confession. Justified sin destroys relationships and prevents reconciliation. And much, if not all, of justified sin arises in the same way it arose in the garden: from the judgment and resulting condemnation of others. This sin separates us from God exactly as it did Adam.

Although the Christian cannot lose his salvation because of sin or for any other reason, he most certainly can lose his relationship with God because our experiential relationship with God is contingent upon our obedience.

60. 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...”

61. † Acquired physical traits are not passed on to progeny. Only changes the genome can have a physical effect to the offspring. The knowledge of good and evil was an acquired trait, but it is spiritual not physical. It altered the spiritual nature of Adam and Eve and was passed to their progeny.

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

63. See Appendix *Fifteen Centuries of Warnings*

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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.<sup>64</sup>

It is this self-justification that inflames the friction between a husband and wife. Each one is fully convinced that he or she is right and that the other is wrong and worthy of condemnation. The result is conflagration.

Another most lamentable effect of the fruit is that it clouds our judgment. It obscures wisdom and truth with self-justification, defensiveness, judgment and condemnation. We see this clearly with the Sanhedrin.

The political power of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish leaders at the time of Christ) was threatened by Christ because Christ was no conventional religious zealot. Christ was preaching novel (New Testament) scriptural truths and healing incurable infirmities and raising people from the dead. He was an outsider to the Sanhedrin and not part of their political machine.<sup>65</sup> So Christ was a direct threat to the political power of the Sanhedrin and they defended themselves. They started their self-defense with judgment and condemnation:

He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?<sup>66</sup>

However, the only way they could stop Christ was to kill him. But to do this, they would have to justify murder, and that is what they did. They justified the cross by balancing good and evil and structuring their position to where murder was justified. The first focused upon the character of Christ.

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64. John 14:21

65. John 11:51 "Now he did not say this on his own, but as he was high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation" † They were taking turns being High Priest. However, scripture defines the High Priest in terms of families. The office was passed from father to son unless the child was unfit to serve (See Leviticus 16:32).

66. John 10:20

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The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at this glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'<sup>67</sup>

But once this condemnation took hold, the justification for murder followed:

It is in your best interest that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish<sup>68</sup>

The Jewish leaders had their own Messiah crucified in order to protect their power and wealth and they justified what they did in their own minds. Such is the history of the world.

And likewise, it was judgment and condemnation that Judas used to justify his betrayal of Christ.

A woman came to Him [Jesus] with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it upon His head as He reclined at the table. But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said 'Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor'... Then one of the twelve named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests...<sup>69†</sup>

67. Matthew 11:18

68. John 11:49

69. Matthew 26:7,8,9,14 † Compare Judas' condemnation of Christ to Satan's condemnation of the Father. Both of them find fault with the character of God. Judas: "He used this on Himself when he could have sold it and given the money to the poor" and Satan, "He doesn't want you to eat it because He is afraid that you would become a God like Him."

When we judge, we cannot see and understand with clarity and truth. Spouses condemn one another and justify their condemnation. They then relate to one another based upon those condemnations—they have to because if they did not they would belie their own judgments.

It is as if Christ holds up His hands and says,

"Look folks, all men and all women have committed sin.<sup>70</sup> You are both sinners. Accept your spouse exactly the way he or she is and understand that you (yes you), sin as well but you do not see your sin because you justify. Therefore repent and stop your sin. Cease to judge and condemn."

### Anger

Perhaps the virtue self-control is the most lamentable casualty of condemnation. Condemnation numbs self-control and opens the door to anger. Condemnation is the power behind the angry person. Anger is the *expression* of condemnation. But when judgment is removed, condemnation dissolves because without judgment one cannot condemn.

When condemnation disappears, so does anger. Matthew 7:1 is the ultimate anger management tool because it not only manages anger; it eradicates it.

The removal of judgment will have a massive beneficial effect on a struggling marriage because it removes anger and even if only one party yields to Christ, the effect is astounding.

1. Once judgment is permitted, the imposition of condemnation in one form or another is inevitable and condemnation alters the way we see our spouse.

2. Condemnation is self-perpetuating because the judgment of others protects the self-image of the person who judges by justifying his sins, including the sin of condemnation.

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70. Romans 5:12 "...death spread to all me because all sinned"

3. Judgment facilitates the artificial view that people should be categorized.

4. *The most telling effect of judgment*, however, is that it enables and encourages conditional love. Judgment is the opposite of unconditional love. Evaluating and balancing good points and bad points to determine the extent to which a spouse is worthy of love and acceptance is what judgment is and it is what conditional love is. Conditional love is nothing but judgment that is more forgiving.

The profound wisdom and effect of two simple words points directly to their divine source and it is no surprise that Jesus Christ commands us to

"Judge not"



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## Chapter 10

### Marital Equilibrium

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#### HOW THE TWO ROLES CREATE AN EQUILIBRIUM

The biblical marriage is like a three-legged chair. One leg is the husband, the other is the wife and the third is Christ. The chair is love and the seat on the chair is trust. If just one of the three legs fails, the chair falls. In this way, the entire structure of the biblical marriage rests upon each spouse being surrendered to the commands of scripture.

There are, of course, innumerable different marital arrangements in the world. But only the biblical marriage can secure the benefits and the blessings of the Creator. Love lives forever in the biblical marriage. And its quality and intensity is determined by the extent that the spouses yield to their God.

When both spouses yield, they allow the paradigm of scripture to create an equilibrium with their respective roles in the marriage.

#### The Husband Gives to the Wife

Scripture teaches that it is the husband's duty to love his wife.<sup>1</sup> This tells us that God has created woman to be loved. This is not simply a rule of behavior; it is a reality that is an essential part of the family. It has been said that love is like air to women. It must be expressed and expressed constantly.

Titus 2:5 tells the biblical wife that she will be "the keeper of the home." And Ephesians 5:22 tells her that she must be "subject to her own husband." These two scriptures mean that the biblical wife will have relinquished a career outside the home and to a certain extent relinquished the final authority over her own life. Thus, by making this commitment, she is giving up a large piece of her life in total

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1. 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."

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reliance that her husband will not abuse his authority but use it to benefit his wife and children. Every day that passes is just one more day of her life invested in her husband and her children. She needs to be—and certainly deserves to be—reassured and made *really* sure that her husband loves her and is trustworthy and fulfilling his part of the bargain.

The very first thing that the husband should do is to ensure that his wife not only knows that he loves her but that she is fully convinced of it at all times.

If the husband fails to express love regularly, she may conclude that his love is diminishing. If she is a biblical wife, this understanding can be serious threat because her husband is (or is supposed to be) the spiritual, structural and financial support of the family.<sup>2</sup>

Love is not just the province of the woman. Love is life.<sup>3</sup> † God is love and God is spiritual (eternal) life.<sup>4</sup> A brief look at the relational scriptures shows a repeated emphasis on love.<sup>5</sup> Love is the foundation of the scriptural marriage and it is the obligation of the husband to ensure that love and its elements<sup>6</sup> are present. The wife requires love and expressions of love—so does God.<sup>7</sup> We express love for God by yielding to His word.

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.<sup>8</sup>

2. 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.”

3. † 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).

4. John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”

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

6. See First Corinthians 13

7. † Knowing God rests on love and the e

8. John 14:21

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We can know God only by yielding to Him because of a sincere desire to know Him.<sup>9</sup>◇ And knowing God is everything.

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him.<sup>10</sup>

God has created woman to be desired and attractive to men; it is a woman's human need. Being attractive is what she was made to be and she needs to know it. When a husband tells his wife that she is beautiful, he fulfilling her need, affirming her value and demonstrating that he sees her as the person that she was created to be. If her husband, perhaps by his silence, indicates that he does not acquiesce that she is fulfilling that need, then she will be more receptive to another man paying her the compliment that she needs to hear.

Especially for the young mother who is changing diapers and keeping up with unending needs of others, it is absolutely essential that she knows her husband loves her and that at the end of the day they will be together alone. Time to recharge.

The home in the biblical marriage is everything. The home is wife's domain and the expression of her self-respect. The role of the man is to pay for it and provide wisdom, strength, leadership and stability, but not control. The husband may have the last say in what

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9. ◇ Note the care with which Christ framed these words. He is not issuing a command to obey Him; He is making a statement, "If you love me, I will make myself known to you—and the way you express your love to Me is by following My commands. Obedience (respect) is My love language." This is not a command; it is a statement of fact. Obedience has to be voluntary and it has to be sincere if it is going to have any effect upon God. This passage expresses the difference between legalism and actually knowing God. Knowing God is a relationship; it is a spiritual love affair. On the other hand, legalism is not a relationship. Legalism is a trade. Legalism is where one does what God says and in return God gives something back. This is not what Christ is saying. Christ is saying if you love Me, then you will obey and I will make Myself known to you. He is saying the same thing that every sincere human lover says to his beloved, "If you want relate to me on that level, you must be motivated by a sincere affection. Doing all the right things is no enough. You have to want to know me."

10. Second Peter 1:3

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should be a rare disagreement regarding family policy, but the wife is the keeper of the home. If the wife is denied control over her home or if she is denied a home, her spirit may break.

Everyone, however, makes mistakes. Generally, where the biblical structure of authority and the biblical admonitions against sin are respected, God will take up the slack created by unwise decisions.

### The Wife Gives to the Husband

Scripture teaches that it is the wife's duty to show respect to her husband.<sup>11</sup> From this we learn that respect is paramount to the husband. The reason for this is because God has created men to require respect. Both husband and wife, of course, require both love and respect. The difference is that with the husband, the emphasis is on respect and with the wife the emphasis is on love.

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 to the husband. Criticism and repeated expressions of dissatisfaction are the opposite of respect.

A husband can deal with a wife who does not show him respect, but he cannot love her because expressions of dissatisfaction in whatever form are assaults upon what God has made the husband to be. God has stamped into the biblical husband the need to provide for his family and lead it. That means his goal is to make his wife content and appreciative. Continued expression of discontent is an assault upon what God has made him to be. Constant complaint is a statement that says he has failed. Men can withstand only a certain number of these statements before they are forced to admit failure in the most important area of their lives.

When a man exercises his biblical authority in the marriage he is not doing so for the purpose of control. He is expressing how he was made.

What if the man is, in actual fact, a failure as a husband? Reinforcing that understanding will eviscerate all hope of reformation.

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

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Men are made by the respect and love 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 respect has on a man. They perceive their fidelity as loving. Men see it as empowering.

The effect of a woman's love and respect may be expressed in her picture sitting on a desk in a room filled with stress or perhaps it is taped to the control panel fighter plane or perhaps it is the blurred image 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 simply rules; they are expressions of reality and following them will provide your marriage and family with 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.

### Infidelity

Infidelity is a flat bar to a biblical Christian marital relationship because it is serious sin.<sup>12</sup> And if there is to be a reconciliation for adultery, the adultery must completely cease *first*. Total cessation of an adulterous affair has to be a requisite before reconciliation in a scriptural marriage can even be discussed because adultery destroys trust and it is a significant sin and will therefore bar any experiential relationship with God.

The spouse who has committed physical adultery will most probably attempt to justify it. Herein lies the immense value of righteousness. If the opposite spouse is without sin, the adulterer cannot balance out the guilt and is all the more likely to eventually confess and repent. Guilt can be the lever that brings someone to Christ.

The adulterer may justify the sin in various ways. For instance, if the adulterer is the wife, gossip, condemnation and slander of her husband to friends effectively says "He deserved it" and that belief goes a long way toward numbing the guilt. As long as she can con-

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12. Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery"

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vince herself that her husband is equally guilty of other sins, she can balance the guilt in her own mind. She solidifies her beliefs by repeated slander, which may later become compulsive. When two guilty wives meet to discuss their husbands over coffee, Satan will make certain to attend.

If the adulterer is the husband, his condemnation may be expressed in inordinate outbreaks of anger and condemnation for unrelated failures of the wife. And the flabbergasted wife may be at a total loss to understand why.

When adultery or some other serious sin has been committed, biblical confrontation is required.<sup>13</sup>

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. Christ taught that to look upon a woman to lust after her is to commit adultery in one's heart<sup>14</sup>.

I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>14</sup>

To lust after someone is to entertain a desire for sexual intercourse with someone who is not a spouse. The scripture refers to the man who looks on a woman *for the purpose of lusting*. The passage does not refer to the man who looks upon a woman and appreciates her beauty or the man who desires a woman as a wife or girlfriend. It refers to looking upon someone for the purpose of lusting for sex.

It is not sin for married men and women to become attracted to someone else outside the marriage. Sin occurs when that attraction is followed up. The way to avoid the temptation is to pray that God would give the tempted person His love for the object of his desire.

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13. 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."

14. Matthew 5:28

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To adulterate means to introduce a foreign substance into something that is pure. When the adultery is in the form of illicit sex, the seed of the family itself can become physically adulterated. But marital love can also be adulterated by flirtations. Indeed, some woman can be more offended by improper non-sexual relationships between her husband and another woman than a physical adultery. Relationships of this nature, although they may be fleeting in nature, sow doubt and uncertainty and adulterate trust.

Problems may arise 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 because the issue is trust, not an objective right or an objective wrong. 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. It is therefore the *offended* spouse who should have the last word on what is appropriate and what is not.

A marital relationship can be adulterated by words that convey rejection. Threats of divorce are verbal adultery. They adulterate the marriage vows and sear the previously existing trust.

Paul's epistle to Titus refers to elders as being men who are beyond reproach.<sup>15</sup> And deacons should be "husbands of only one wife..."<sup>16</sup> However, the full meaning of this passage is lost in the English translation. The (literal) original Greek for "husband of one wife"<sup>17</sup> is a "one woman man." This 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 offer communications with the opposite sex that carry questionable implications.<sup>18</sup>

15. 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..."

16. First Timothy 3:12

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

18. The various forms of adultery mentioned in this section may or may not have been included in original commandment not to commit adultery. They are included here because they all adulterate the marriage in some way.

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## 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 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.<sup>19</sup> Imagine that each party complied with the requests of the other party not because they were reasonable and necessary but because compliance was an opportunity to express love. That is a scriptural Christian marriage and it is possible because God empowers it.<sup>20</sup>

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.

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

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

Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loves it.<sup>21</sup>

Why does God's servant love His word? Because he has *discovered what God's word can do for him.*

It is for these reasons 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 because dust dirty. It is backing away so that the dust will not be blown into the air by verbal fisticuffs. It is depriving the offender of a forum 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 injuries and vindication. He takes the failures and the injuries, the violated rights and 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, they fall into the sea of God's forgetfulness. They become like old ticket stubs. They show you were once there but the event is long since over.



21. Psalm 119:140

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## Chapter 11

### Righteousness and Adversity

#### WHAT WAS GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE GARDEN AND THE FALL

Why did God put the tree in the garden in the first place? He must have known what would happen when newly created man and woman were placed in a garden with lovely low-hanging forbidden fruit. And then to leave them alone with Satan under the forbidden tree? Under those circumstances, it would appear that the eating of the forbidden fruit was inevitable. Why was this done?

The Creator (being God) was certainly aware of that they would do, but He chose to let them do it. He had made Adam and Eve to be imperfect beings knowing full well that their imperfection and vulnerability would result in the fall of man. God had made man with free will and He chose not to intervene when man exercised that free will.

Man acquired the knowledge of good and evil and on that day man became fully man. With the knowledge of good and evil, man could use it for good or for ill. He could use it to recognize what is right and do it; or he could use it to recognize a more desirable wrong and justify it. God had created an independent being who could make a truly independent choice.

All of the angelic host, both good and bad can make choices, but because they are clearly aware of God's presence, choices to do good are not as difficult as they would be if God's existence were "debatable" as it is in this world and where God's word had become viewed as obsolete. Only man lives in a world where sin can be easily justified and every public schoolhouse teaches evolution. It is when the wrong choice is easy that the right choice becomes significant.

This is especially true when adversity is thrown into the mix, because the existence of adversity and fear can make the wrong choice far, far more appealing.

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Without the lever of adversity and the possibility to choose the wrong and justify it, the righteous choices of man would be no more real than actors reading scripts on a stage, speaking courageous pretense, faking courage without fear, receiving honor without price, working without effort or loving without passion. Without real choices we become no more significant than shadows that flicker in a cinema or the pixels that glow on a computer screen. Turn the switch and they are gone.

Our Creator has placed us in a world of adversity in moral free-fall. He has done so because it is only that soil that real fruit can be produced. And bearing that fruit is our *raison d'être*, our reason for being. We were created to be linked to Him and to bear the fruits of righteousness like the clusters grapes on a vine. But without Him we cannot yield. Apart from Him we can do nothing.

In fact, He gives us that very choice: remain in Him and bear fruit or do nothing of significance.

I am the vine, you are the branches; the one who remains in Me, and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."<sup>1</sup>

Christ is the vine. He is the gnarled, bark encrusted vine, the vine that gives nutrition and life to the branches. He is the perennial, rooted and permanent, vine surviving the winter, the droughts and the floods. The vine is always there. The branches and the grapes are annual; they are good for a season and then they die. The vine remains.

But the vine does not yield the fruit. The branches yield the fruit and *we are the branches*.

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1. John 15:5

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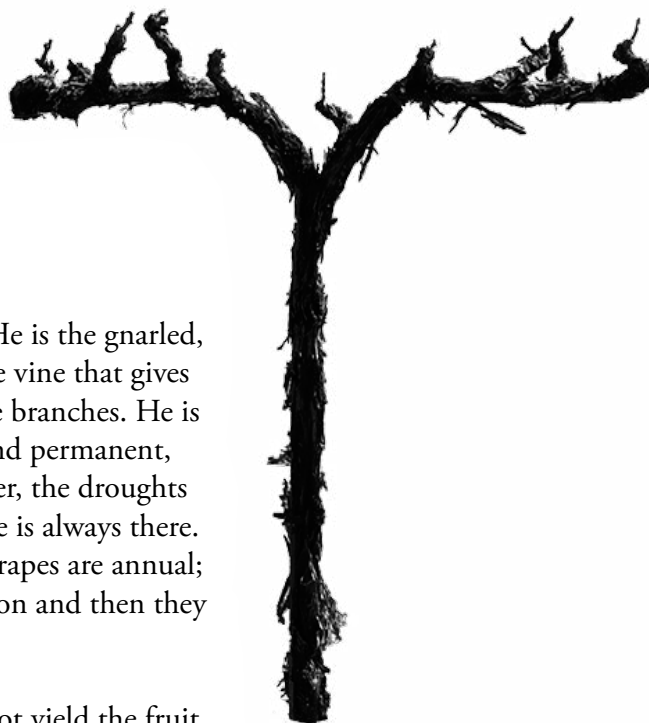
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We are the fruit bearers, the ones that yield the precious, precious grapes, the grapes of righteousness—the fruits of the cross. We are God's vineyard. We are God's harvest.



The branches are open and vulnerable to the weather and the seasons. Their delicate grapes will wither in the dry heat and rot with too much rain.

And it is the last picking that yields the sweetest wine...when the cold wind moans and swirls through the vineyard and bites its deepest just before the snow.

In the same way we bear the fruits of righteousness. In a remorseless world with winds of adversity and flurries of sin, we bear the fruit. And the sweetest wine comes from the coldest winter.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love [agápe], joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>2†</sup>

Righteousness is immensely important to our relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> Righteousness is immensely important to God. Righteousness was the reason why Christ was born, the reason for His ministry and the reason for the cross. And righteousness enables love. That is what the world does not understand. All of it, everything that has to do with God, revolves around righteousness. We can define what is right for us or wrong for us and get with like-minded people who have the same opinion. But that does not change Him nor does it change how He made us. His instructions in righteousness are not simply rules for life; they are descriptions of who we really are. And they cannot be broken without inevitable consequence.

Our relationship to God is immensely important to our relationship with others because our relationship to God provides the power to love and the power to accept. The power to agápe originates in

2. Galatians 5:22 † There are other fruits of righteousness as well.

3. First John 2:3 "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments;" First John 3:9 "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remains in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

God,<sup>4</sup> and it comes to us through the knowledge of Him.<sup>5</sup> Righteousness is the key to the knowledge of God<sup>6</sup> and righteousness is the key to agápe.

We were not created to spend a lifetime churning self-indulgence like a mouse in a golden running wheel. We are made in His image, created to be—and are—the branches of the vine of Jesus Christ. And we cannot be content with who we are unless we are being what He created us to be: fruit bearers bearing the fruits of righteousness.

### Perspective

Life has taught us in a thousand ways to see life from the perspective of ourselves. But the only true perspective is God's.

Jesus Christ was born into this world as a baby. When He grew up, He had a world changing three year ministry in Israel and then was crucified and buried. He was resurrected on the third day according to the scriptures and His death paid for the sins of the world. And we can be saved if we sincerely trust in what He did for us.

All that is true, but it is seen from the perspective of our life. The perspective of God is vastly different.

God's perspective does not begin with the baby Jesus in a manger, it begins with the Creator who created *you*. The Creator of the universe made *you* and He made you for a purpose. This same Creator made Himself into a man. He voluntarily *became sin for you* and died a horrible death at the hands of myopic, small-minded, politicians who were protecting their own positions. And He did it for the sole purpose of paying the death-penalty for the sin of the entire world.

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4. First John 4:7 "Beloved, let's love one another; for love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

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

6. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is 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."

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He did this for you—yes you—you who lived two thousand years after He became man—*you*, He died for *you*, you, the one struggling with life in a world in moral free-fall, squirming in depravity.

He died for *you* and He did so for one reason and one reason alone—because He loves *you* and He loves you because He *made* you. He loves you with a love that is so deep and so real that none of us will ever be able to perceive it or understand it because it is impossible to comprehend. And if you think your Creator is swayed for one instant by the labels placed upon you by this world, think again. If you think that He is moved in the least by anything except who you are inside, think again. He is no more swayed by the things in the transitory world than He was by the power and wealth of the Pharisees who mocked Him as he bled His way to Calvary to be crucified *for them*.

Your Creator has His hand on your shoulder and the greatest gift that He can give you is the independent capacity to yield fruit. And inner contentment, wisdom, fulfillment and eternal life are the results of that fruit.

That is our *raison d'être*, the reason for our existence, the reason for our being.

The righteousness that we yield is eternal.

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no *more*: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.<sup>7</sup>

... the righteous [shall go into] life eternal.<sup>8</sup>

...as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Proverbs 10:25

8. Matthew 25:46

9. Romans 5:21

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It was about 1400 BC when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and God gave the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle for worship in the desert. Six chapters in Exodus (35-40) are dedicated to the instructions for everything from the fabric of the tent curtains to the number of sockets.

When He inspired Moses to write down these instructions, massive things were happening elsewhere in the world. Empires were rising and falling; armies were marching, men and kings were dying and millions were enslaved. We find little of this in scripture however because God was far more concerned with the length of the curtains of the tabernacle and the colors and sockets. Why is this? Because from God's perspective, a portable tabernacle carried by a band of escaped Egyptian slaves was far more important.

It carried the eternal jewel—eternal life—a hope of which the pharaohs with their pyramids could only dream. The pharaohs had it right within their grasp and never knew it—it was held firmly by their slaves. The power and their gold of the pharaohs obscured the truth until finally only the gold remained—entombed in the center of pyramids and held in centuries of silence, dusted by whatever was left of its glorious kings.

Eternal life was not for those kings. It is reserved for scrawny teenagers who walk forward in country churches and empty men and women who are looking for something and have no idea what it is—maybe it's Christ: "Maybe I'll give it a try." Eternity totters upon the whim of somebody in the back pew of a half empty church or in the silence of someone who stops to read a gospel tract.

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.<sup>10</sup>

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

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10. Psalm 37:11

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But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.<sup>11</sup>

Why does God look for the weak and base people? Because those are the people who look for Him.

I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me.<sup>12</sup>

The tabernacle in the wilderness was not just a worship center; it was the interface between God and man. It was the connection. The rest of the world with its armies and the kings and empires and all their glory and death was nothing but tides of the world rolling through time.

The interface has changed, but God's perspective has not. The interface between God and man is no longer the tabernacle. It is far closer now; it is a spiritual connection. It is knowing God.<sup>13</sup> † And knowing God occurs when Christians turn from sin.

In the failing marriage, righteousness and love arrive when a spouse turns from the sin of judgment and ceases to demand justice. Knowing God arrives when an angry spouse decides not to take a

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11. First Corinthians 1:26-29

12. Proverbs 8:17

13. Second Peter 3:1 "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him" † Man's capacity to know God was predicted in Jeremiah 31:31-34 "...they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them"

wrong into account, ignores the offense and experiences the spiritual power of His presence. Not taking offense is an expression of agápe<sup>14</sup> and God is agápe.<sup>15</sup>

Righteousness occurs when someone decides abandon the need for justice and ceases to judge others.<sup>16</sup> This too is an expression of agápe. God is agápe.

When He sees us, He does not see our body, but our soul.<sup>17†</sup> He sees our intent and our sincerity<sup>18</sup> and He is fully aware that He has created us as imperfect beings.<sup>19</sup> He searches our heart and deals with us according to what He sees.<sup>20</sup> He has given to us alone the inestimable privilege of bearing the fruits of righteousness.

### God's Love Language

Each righteous choice is an expression of God's agápe, a point of light in the darkness of a world filled with iniquity.

Righteousness is the coin of the realm of the Kingdom of God. It is the way that we express faith and it is the means by which we can know God *in this life*:

- 
14. First Corinthians 13:5 “[agápe] does not take into account a wrong suffered”
  15. First John 4:8 “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is [agápe].”
  16. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not”
  17. † See Ezekiel 18 for a very clear delineation between the soul and the body and the fact that it is the soul who is the person.
  18. First Samuel 16:7 “for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”
  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. . . My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.
  20. Jeremiah 17:10 “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” See also Isaiah 64:4-6 where God states that He meets with him that works righteousness, but in one sense our righteous acts can be as “filthy rags.”

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He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is 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.<sup>21</sup>

Righteousness is how we enjoy God's continuing presence inside of 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.<sup>22</sup>

Righteousness is God's love language. Righteousness is life. And righteousness and justice are the very foundation of God's power—it is the only way God works.<sup>23</sup> He hates unrighteousness<sup>24</sup> and because He Himself is righteous and just,<sup>25</sup> He must enforce the inevitable consequence of sin and permit the ax to fall but He takes no pleasure in it.<sup>26</sup>

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21. John 14:21

22. John 14:23

23. Proverbs 21:21 He who pursues righteousness and loyalty finds life, righteousness and honor." Psalm 89:14 "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne." 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.'"

24. Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul who sins will die." Ezekiel 3:20 "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die." Also see Revelation 21:8.

25. Job 27:33 "He is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness"

26. Ezekiel 33:11 "I take not pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked shall turn from his way and live."



## Righteousness is the Foundation

Within scripture's continually reiterated concept of righteousness and obedience, God weaves numerous and specific facets of righteousness. Among these facets are love (God is love<sup>27</sup>) are honesty,<sup>28</sup> integrity,<sup>29</sup> fidelity,<sup>30</sup> courage,<sup>31</sup> diligence,<sup>32</sup> love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, temperance [self-control]<sup>33</sup> kindness,<sup>34</sup> and others.

As we assimilate these qualities, they become consistent patterns of behavior in us and we become that person. These patterns of behavior are called virtues. Virtues are expressions of righteousness. Virtues are life<sup>35</sup> and they are eternal.<sup>36</sup> When they are expressed to our beloved, they are expressions of love, real love, emotionally powerful true love.

27. 1 John 4:8 "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." The love in this passage is "agápe," which means a love that is wholly unconditional.

28. Romans 12:17 "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

29. Psalms 25:21 "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait upon thee." Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright shall guide them..."

30. Titus 2:2,10 "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience ... shewing all good fidelity..."

31. Psalms 27:14 "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart..."; Psalms 31:24 "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."

32. 2 Peter 1:5 "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge..."

33. Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness [humility], temperance [self-control]..."

34. 2 Peter 1:7 "And to godliness [add] brotherly kindness..."

35. Proverbs 12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death."

36. Romans 8:10 "And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness."; Romans 8:6 "For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace."

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Love is like faith. It dies if it is not expressed.<sup>37</sup>

The great tragedy of our era is that these virtues are rarely taught to children. We fail our children when we fail to teach them virtue; we are sowing the wind and we will reap the whirlwind<sup>38</sup> because when they are adults, they will become the sum of their choices, just like us.

Righteousness and virtue are by far the most prevalent aspects of all scripture. In the Old Testament, righteousness permeates the scripture from Cain and Able<sup>39</sup> to Judges;<sup>40</sup> it stretches from the Ten Commandments<sup>41</sup> to the prophet Malachi.<sup>42</sup> Righteousness is the rea-

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37. James 2:26 " For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

38. Hosea 8:7 "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"

39. Jude 1:11 "Woe unto them! for they have gone the way of Cain..."

40. Judges 21:25 "In those days...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

41. Exodus 20

42. Malachi 2:17, 3:5 "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied *Him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good...I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless..."

son for the Old Testament law. It flows through Psalms like a river of purpose<sup>43</sup> and forms the bedrock of Proverbs.<sup>44</sup> It is the reason behind all of the prophets and it is the light of their prophecies.<sup>45</sup>

In the New Testament, Christ was crucified for the purpose of providing forgiveness and righteousness<sup>46</sup> to those who had irreparably severed themselves from their Creator by the commission of sin.<sup>47</sup> Righteousness is the core of Christ's ministry and His teachings; it is the reason for His death on the cross<sup>48</sup> and we are made in the likeness of Christ.<sup>49</sup>

Behind all the lessons, the themes, the drama, the history and all the teachings in all of scripture stands this silent giant: righteousness. It is no wonder that God has placed the apple of His eye (man) into a world where man *himself* can become the author of this eternal jewel. And you—you are the author of righteousness each time you refuse to judge and condemn and each time you refuse to keep a grudge or

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43. Psalms 1:1 “Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” Psalms 11:7 “For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.”

44. Proverbs 21:12 “He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness and honor.”

45. Isaiah “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it.” Isaiah 32:17 “And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.”

46. Romans 3:22 “...the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe...”

47. Second Corinthians 5:21 “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

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

49. Romans 6:5 “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection.”

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remember a wrong. You are the author of a point of shining eternal light each time you forgive a wrong, a wrong authored by someone who justified every second of your pain.

It is for this reason that the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>50</sup> For without the knowledge of good and evil, there can be neither good nor evil. When man ingested this fruit, the knowledge of good and evil became part of him and he would use it to justify his own sin and condemn the sins of others—or else he would yield to the commands of Christ and use it to recognize his own sin and turn from it. It is his choice.

This is man.

No other created being can do this. Man alone lives in a world without boundaries, a world that scrambles for vestiges of truth while embracing perversions of practically every unspeakable thing and all the while calling it good. It is in that crucible that choices to do right become immensely significant<sup>51</sup> and they are powerful blows against the death-throws of a dying family.

We live in a world where righteousness flashes like diamonds against a backdrop of evil. Eternal life and eternal death hang in the balance.

### The Effect of Judging on the Fruits of the Spirit

Judgment and condemnation cancel the fruits of the Spirit. Here is how:

*These are the primary fruits of the Spirit:*

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>52</sup>

50. Genesis 2:17 “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

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

52. Galatians 5:22 † There are other fruits of righteousness as well.

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*This is how each fruit is canceled by continuing to judge others:*

**Love.** The core of love is acceptance. But the core of judgment and the condemnation is rejection. The presence of judgment and condemnation cancels acceptance and cancels love. The amount one loves is directly proportional to the amount one refuses to judge. If you don't believe that statement, just try it and see what happens.

A marriage with a pattern of on-off love is a marriage surviving on conditional love. Judgment is the staple of conditional love—one "loves" until one determines that the beloved has fails in some measure and therefore not worthy of continued acceptance.

**Joy.** One cannot love while condemning and without love there is no joy.

**Peace.** When we judge, we burden ourselves with a task that for which we are immensely unsuited. Judgment of others requires the construction and maintenance of a framework of categories (boxes) and justifications (or condemnations) that will be applied selectively. This structure is artificial and requires consistent mental effort. It is tiring and it is fake. One cannot live in peace when one defines himself or herself with a card-house of illusions. Peace comes with humility and knowing God.

**Patience.** Judgment is the opposite of patience. It creates impatience because judgment so easily views others as inept and so quickly sees itself as the primary source of righteousness, competence and wisdom. For some, viewing others are inept is necessary to substantiate an inflated view of self. Frustration and anger are the inevitable results.

**Kindness and goodness.** It is difficult to extend kindness and goodness to someone who is seen as inept, sinful or neglectful.

**Faithfulness.** Judgment and condemnation creates an artificial and unattractive image of person who is judged. If the person who is judged is a spouse, the unpleasing effect of the image serves to justify unfaithfulness in one form or another (physical or mental unfaithfulness). Fidelity struggles when judgment decrees that the one to whom fidelity is owed is undeserving.

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**Gentleness.** Once someone has been judged as inept or undeserving and placed in the appropriate box, being gentle with that person contradicts the decision that the person is not worthy of gentle treatment.

There are, of course, situations where gentle treatment is not appropriate, but in those cases forceful treatment should be based upon the circumstances, not condemnation of the person.

**Self-control.** Perhaps the virtue self-control is the most lamentable casualty to fall victim to the sin of condemnation. Anger is the *expression* of condemnation; condemnation is the power behind anger. When judgment is removed, anger dissolves because without judgment one cannot condemn and when one does not condemn, one does not become angry.

Matthew 7:1 is therefore the ultimate anger management tool because it not only manages anger; it eradicates it.

The blanket refusal to judge cannot help but have a beneficial effect on any marriage; and a massive effect on a struggling marriage.

### Why Judgment (not just condemnation) is Forbidden

Why does scripture exclude judgment when it is condemnation that does the damage? Why not simply exclude condemnation and leave judgment to the wisdom of man? There are several excellent reasons for this:

1. Once judgment is permitted, the imposition of condemnation in one form or another is inevitable because it is condemnation of others that justifies sin. And all of us justify sin.<sup>53</sup>
2. The condemnation that results from judgment is self-perpetuating because judgment of others exalts self by deprecating others.
3. Judgment facilitates the artificial view that people should be categorized.

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53. Romans 3:23 "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

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4. However, **the most serious effect of judgment** is that it enables and encourages conditional love. *Affection with judgment is what conditional love is.* Evaluating and balancing good points and bad points to determine the extent to which a spouse is worthy of love and acceptance is what conditional love *is*. Judgment *prevents* unconditional love (agápe) because it is the *opposite* of unconditional love.

The profound effect of these two simple words on human relationships points directly to their divine source: Jesus Christ.

"Judge not"



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## Fifteen Centuries of Warnings

THE BIBLE CONTAINS 15 CENTURIES OF WARNINGS THAT SIN KILLS

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**1400 BC**                      Genesis 2:17

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

**967 BC**                      Psalm 33:18,19

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

**593 BC**                      Ezekiel 18:4

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

**593 BC**                      Ezekiel 33:11

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

**30 AD**                      John 8:51, 52

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



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

55 AD Romans 1:32  
 Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death...

55 AD Romans 6:16  
 ...sin leading to death...

55 AD Romans 6:21  
 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death.

55 AD Romans 6:23, 24  
 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.

55 AD Second Timothy 1:10  
 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality

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55 AD

Romans 6:16

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

68 AD

Second Peter 3:9

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

80 AD

Hebrews 2:9

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

90 AD

Revelation 2:11

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

90 AD

Revelation 20:14,15  
Revelation 21:8

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



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## Believe in God-But How?

### HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE IN GOD IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD?

If God is really there, why can't we see Him? Is there really an invisible God out there who never speaks and never makes Himself known? How can this God, who is said to have created us, not be able to communicate? Why should anyone believe that? And why should anyone believe some ancient Jewish religious writings that talk about Him? Where is this God? If there is such a God, He must be hiding.

Let's see what those ancient religious writings (the Bible) really do say about God. Then you can form your own opinion.

So, does the Bible say that God is hiding Himself?

Yes, it does.

Does that mean that He makes Himself known to some but not others?

Yes.

Where does the Bible say that? In Matthew 11:27, Jesus tells us:

...nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier in His ministry, He had a conversation with a man named Nicodemus about the same thing. Jesus told him that only those who have been born again can see the Kingdom of God. It is hidden from everyone else:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

What does "born again" mean? Nicodemus asks,

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1. Matthew 11:27

2. John 3:3

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“How can a man be born when he is old?”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus tells him that there is a spiritual side to man; we are not all physical. To enter the Kingdom of God, we must be born of the Spirit:

...Unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup>

So there are two births. One is a physical birth and the other is a spiritual birth. Jesus was saying that there is a spiritual reality that we can't see unless we are born of the Spirit just like there is a physical reality that we can't see unless we are born physically.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Don't be surprised that there is a spiritual reality. Everyone who is born again can experience it:

Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus is saying we can experience the Kingdom of God just as certainly as we can feel the wind. But we cannot feel the spiritual "wind" until after we are born again.

So, how can we become born again? Jesus tells us.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

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3. John 3:4

4. John 3:5.

5. John 3:6

6. John 3:7,8

7. John 3:14-16

What did Jesus mean by that? The Bible tells us that after the Jews left Egypt, they complained to Moses about taking them out of slavery and bringing them to a wilderness where they might die. Because of this mistrust, God sent poisonous snakes into the Jewish camp and some people were bitten and died.<sup>8</sup>

The poisonous snakes show us three very important things: 1) God is very serious about how we relate to Him; 2) sin kills and 3) from God's perspective, physical death is not the ultimate tragedy. The ultimate tragedy is spiritual death.

The poisonous snakes were a representation of sin. Sin results in spiritual death and everybody in the camp was bitten. But God sent a cure and the cure was really simple. Moses put a statute of a serpent on a pole and raised it high so that everyone in the camp could see it. To be cured, all they had to do was to look at the serpent.<sup>9</sup> But can you believe it—some people did not even bother to look.

Jesus was saying that He is like the serpent on the pole. We have all been bitten by sin,<sup>10</sup> just like the Israelites in the wilderness. But all we have to do is to look to Him and we will be healed the same way they were. But can you believe it—some people did not even bother to look! They remain spiritually dead because sin kills spiritual life.<sup>11</sup>

Don't be like those who refused to be healed. You must look to the cross to be saved.

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8. Numbers 21:5,6 †

9. Numbers 21:8 ““Make a poisonous serpent out of brass and fasten it to a pole. Anyone who has been bitten and who looks at it will live.”

10. Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned...”; Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

11. Sin kills. Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.” Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die...” Romans 6:21 “What benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death.”

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## Spiritual Death

That does spiritual death feel like? It feels like an internal void, an emptiness inside that cannot be filled. It is a non-physical feeling. It is an empty spiritual feeling. If you are one of those people you know it.

When Jesus Christ saves us from eternal death we can feel it. This process is called "salvation" because it is being saved from eternal spiritual death. Salvation is a gift.<sup>12</sup> It is free because it has to be free. It has to be free because if we had paid for it ourselves, we would be spiritually dead for the rest of eternity.<sup>13</sup>

We can't avoid the death of our body, but we can avoid the death of our soul. All bodies die. But not all souls die. The soul that sins will die, unless it has been forgiven:

The soul that sins will die.<sup>14</sup>

Why did Jesus compare himself to a serpent when the serpent represents sin? Because in order to save us, Jesus became sin for us so that we could be righteous in God's sight.<sup>15</sup>

Since Christ paid the penalty for our sin, we are forgiven and born to a spiritual life and spiritual life is eternal life when we trust in Christ. When we trust in Him, we obtain eternal spiritual life.<sup>16†</sup>

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12. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

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

14. Ezekiel 18:4

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

16. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ..." † Although our body will die (Hebrews 9:27) it will later be resurrected (Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:4-6).

## Kingdom of God

This is why Jesus said that experiencing the Kingdom of God is being born again. It is being born to spiritual life. Just like being physically born is to experience physical life, being born again is to experience spiritual life.<sup>17</sup> We cannot experience spiritual life until we have been born again.

When we pass from spiritual death to spiritual life,<sup>18</sup> we can feel it and experience it. Eternal life is knowing God *now*, in this life.<sup>19</sup> So we are talking about a spiritual reality that we can *experience*. We are talking about actually knowing God. We are talking about feeling the wind.

So, specifically, how does one experience the second birth? It starts with trusting in Jesus Christ and being forgiven:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”<sup>20</sup>

17. John 3:3 “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

18. John 5:24 “Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

19. John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” Eternal life is not simply living forever. It is a spiritual life and entirely different from our physical life.

20. Acts 16:31. This passage refers to the “Lord” Jesus Christ because Jesus is God’s son and one with the Father. John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.” The Bible teaches that God is a Trinity. He is one God but three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The family is a mirror of who God is: all equal and all one but with different functions.

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But believing in Christ does not necessarily mean knowing or experiencing His presence. It means trusting in Him. Trusting in Christ is the same type of trust that we place in a doctor that we have never met to perform an operation.<sup>21</sup>

### Trusting in Christ

Trusting in Christ is simple. It may be done through prayer. For instance, one may pray “God, I come to You and I am trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all my sin.”

You can pray this prayer even though you are not certain that anything will happen because that is what faith is. Faith is trusting even though you are not certain. Is it really that easy? Yes. He made it easy on purpose. And it free for the asking.<sup>22</sup> You can't earn it yourself and you can't get it from anybody, like from a priest or a pope. You get it from Jesus Christ or not at all:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.”<sup>23</sup>

How much faith does one need? Just enough to trust sincerely in Christ. The invitation is open to all.

And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.<sup>24</sup>

God resolves our doubts about Him when we experience the knowledge of God. So, we are talking concrete reality here. Spiritual reality, to be sure, but reality that we can experience.

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21. The original Greek word means to trust. See A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (Second Ed. 1958, Univ. Of Chicago Press), s.v. πιστεύω, “believe (in), trust.”

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

23. John 14:6

24. Revelation 22:17



Trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin is all that is needed for eternal salvation. But it is not all that is needed in order to experience the presence of God. Indeed, some people who have trusted in Christ experience nothing as a result of it. Some Christians don't feel any different after they trust in Christ and many just don't believe that anyone really experiences the presence and peace of God. Others simply pretend.

### Knowing God

Why do some people who have trusted in Him never really know Him? Because the whole reason for the death of Jesus Christ is the forgiveness of sin. So, those who accept the benefit of His death and then turn right around and commit the same old sins for which He died, what then? You still remain saved but Christ will not be in your life.

If we trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin but fail to turn away from the very sin that He died to save us from, we can't expect him to make Himself known to us. If we are cleansed of sin one day and then commit the same sin the next day, it makes a mockery of the cross.<sup>25</sup> It is "receiving the grace of God in vain."<sup>26</sup>

If we want God to make Himself known to us, we must turn from sin:

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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup>

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25. See Hebrews 6:6, discussed below

26. Second Corinthians 5:1

27. John 14:21

28. John 14:23

Knowing God is the key to experiencing eternal life now, in this life:

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him...<sup>29</sup>

Taking the first step (trusting Christ) without taking the second step (turning from sin) is like the man who was given a gift card for a free dinner with the finest wine in the finest restaurant in town. He sits down at his table. But he gets up after eating the bread and butter and mutters to himself on the way out, “I can get that meal anywhere.”

But what if we sincerely turn from sin but falter later? What if we really want to know Him but we keep failing and falling back into sin? Is that making a mockery of the cross? Are we out of the race? No, because faltering and voluntarily turning from sin is all a part of the Christian life. We have been created by God and to bear the fruits of righteousness.<sup>30</sup> Fruit comes when we voluntarily turn from sin. But if we are to turn from sin, sin must first exist.

Spiritual growth is progressive because sin becomes replaced with its righteous alternative over time. But knowing God is not progressive. It is not based upon how well we do, but on how sincere we are when we do it. It’s all about heart.

Yielding is a state of mind, not a result. The result of yielding is righteousness, but it doesn’t happen immediately.<sup>31</sup>† Sincerely yielding our will to God results in experiencing the peace of God early on, but some sins fall off early and some late.

The concept of knowing God is throughout the Bible, not just the New Testament:

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29. Second Peter 1:3

30. John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

31. † We are always righteous in God’s sight because nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:28). But sin destroys our relationship with Him.

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O continue Thy loving kindness to those who know Thee...<sup>32</sup>

And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.

Then you will know the Lord.<sup>33</sup>

And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with your whole heart.<sup>34</sup>

Knowing God is a relationship, not a ritual:

Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things which you do not know...<sup>35</sup>

I called but no one answered; I spoke but they did not listen...<sup>36</sup>

Knowing God is the key to righteousness and internal peace:

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him<sup>37</sup>

Continuing sin is the key to spiritual death and internal emptiness:

They went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty.<sup>38</sup>

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32. Psalm 36:10

33. Hosea 2:20

34. Jeremiah 29:13

35. Jeremiah 33:3

36. Isaiah 66:4

37. Second Peter 1:3

38. Jeremiah 2:5

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Knowing God is not just knowing about Him. One can spend a lifetime studying the Bible but without ever actually knowing God or experiencing His immense peace. Only one thing stands in the way and that is sin and the true intentions of our heart.

God's presence and His peace is spiritual, not physical, because God is Spirit.<sup>39</sup> Knowing God is therefore a spiritual experience.

Experiencing the presence and the peace of God is the apex of all human experience. Committed, yielded Christians aren't building a stairway to the Kingdom of God; they are already there. They have found something that gets better and better.

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.<sup>40</sup>

So, true Christianity is neither ritual nor rules; it is an experiential relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the reason why the scriptures that tell of knowing God are not formulas; they are love notes. And just like human love, the thing that makes them what they are is *heart*.

He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.<sup>41</sup> ◇  
You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.<sup>42</sup>

Keeping His word is God's love language. Keeping God's commandments to get Him to do something will not get us to Him. But keeping His commandments in order to know Him will. Exactly like human relationships, we must be speak the language of love (or

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39. John 4:24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship in spirit and truth."

40. John 14:21

41. John 14:21 ◇ Note the accuracy of scripture. This verse requires us to keep His commandments to express love to Him. How then can the Christian life be a series of successes and

42. Jeremiah 29:13

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friendship) and that language never includes sin against our lover or our friend. Everyone's love language is righteousness because everyone wants to be treated with love and respect and never insulted or hurt and that is what righteousness is. So, righteousness is the way that God relates, just like we do. Righteousness is God's embrace.

Knowing God is a love thing because God is love.<sup>43</sup> But don't worry about loving God enough. When He makes His presence known, you will love Him. You won't be able to stop yourself.

Perfection is not required and nothing in a relationship with Christ is forced. When we love, we do not require perfection nor does He.<sup>44</sup> What God wants in His relationship with us is the same thing that we want in our relationship with others. We want heart and sincerity. So does He. God does not settle for fake. He may endure fake for a time, just like we do, but ultimately what God requires is a real from-the-heart relationship<sup>45</sup> or none at all. Just like we do.

The Christian life is a progression of being conformed to the righteousness that He has already begun in us.<sup>46</sup> Those who have turned to Christ are already righteous in Christ<sup>47</sup> because Christ has paid for their sins. It is just a matter of yielding and cooperation.

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43. First John 4:8 "...God is love." God is love, but He is not just love. He is much more. God's love is described in First Corinthians 13.

44. Romans 5:8 "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

45. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes (trusts) in Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

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

47. First Corinthians 1:30 "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness..."

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We have all things that pertain to life and Godliness through the true knowledge of Him,<sup>48</sup> so, of course, we have to know Him before we can obtain everything pertaining to life and Godliness. But when we surrender He *makes* us righteous;<sup>49</sup> all we do is cooperate as we partake of His divine nature.<sup>50</sup>◇

### Our Purpose

God's purpose for us is to yield the fruit of the Spirit. Like the vines in His vineyard we are here to yield this fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is composed of the various products of righteousness. And they are all good.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>51</sup>

Within the “love” that God gives us to give to others is additional fruit.

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. Love

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

49. Second Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Philippians 3:8,9 “I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith.”

50. ◇ It is for this reason that the true knowledge of Him does not come progressively as the result of overcoming sin. It is based upon heart because the true knowledge of Him is necessary in order to turn from sin. We cannot do it without Him.

51. See Galatians 5:22

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does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.<sup>52†</sup>

Yielding fruit is immensely important to God and to us because it is what He has created us to do.

I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain...<sup>53</sup>

The different kinds of fruits are virtues, traits to be cultivated. Basically, God is telling us that He wants us to be as good as we can be. He has made us to be righteous, but without Him, we can do “nothing.”

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.<sup>54</sup>

Note that *all* of the fruit of the Spirit is relational. The fruit is either the key to excellent relationships (love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) or result of excellent relationships (joy). God has created us to relate to one another because love is expressed in relationships and love is what God is.<sup>55</sup> God is expressed by loving.

If righteousness is to have significance to man, may must be fallible. It is the choosing to do what is right when we are tempted to do wrong that renders the choice to do right to be significant.

Righteousness cannot exist without its counterpart.<sup>56</sup>

52. First Corinthians 13:4 † There are 4 different loves in biblical Greek. The love referred to in this verse is supernatural and can be fully expressed only through Christ. See the author's *Endless Love*.

53. John 15:16

54. John 15:5

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

56. See the author's *A Reason for Adversity*.

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## What is Sin?

But what is sin? Some people believe that there is no sin or that all sin is relative. And there are differing opinions as to what sin is. The Bible teaches that in order to know God, one must move away from these things: lying,<sup>57†</sup> cheating,<sup>58</sup> stealing,<sup>59</sup> adultery,<sup>60†</sup> fornication,<sup>61</sup> lasciviousness,<sup>62†</sup> sexual immorality,<sup>63†</sup> deceit and gos-

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57. † Lying is viewed as a very significant sin. Revelation 21:8 “...all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Those who lie to others will eventually lie to themselves.

58. Mark 10:19 “You must not give false testimony [or cheat anyone]”

59. Mark 10:19 “You shall not steal” Also see Exodus 20:15

60. Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery” † To adulterate means to pollute. Adultery is not limited to the pollution of a family by the introduction of the seed of a stranger. The marital relationship may be polluted by inappropriate flirting and one’s relationship to God may be polluted by the worship of an idol.

61. Fornication dilutes the capacity of a man or woman to experience true eros (romantic love). One can hardly engage in promiscuity prior to marriage and become faithful after marriage. Be wise young man or young woman. See First Corinthians 6:14.

62. Galatians 5:19 “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness [blatant sensuality]...” (KJV) † One should not confuse lasciviousness with sexuality. Sexuality is not a sin. God created man as a sexual being and His creation is always good. Just as most sin is the misuse of what God has given, lasciviousness is the misuse of sexuality and fornication is the misuse of eros.

63. First Thessalonians 4:3 “...abstain from sexual immorality.” † Sexual immorality in the Bible includes promiscuous sexual encounters and homosexuality. For instance, Romans 1:26, 27 refers to people who “exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire for one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.”



siping, malice, slander, boasting, untrustworthiness, being unloving or unmerciful,<sup>64</sup> envy, drunkenness [including drug use], debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, orgies, and things like these,<sup>65</sup> taking advantage of people,<sup>66</sup> being critical and being condemnatory or unforgiving.<sup>67</sup>

Eventually we all sin in one way or another.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the only difference between us with regard to sin is that we all commit different sins. The only cure is to trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of *all* sin and turn from committing any more sin. And if we falter, we can confess and obtain forgiveness and begin anew.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>69</sup>

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64. Romans 1:28 “God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

65. Galatians 5:21

66. First Corinthians 8 “...you yourselves wrong and defraud.”

67. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not for in the way you judge, so shall you be judged” Matthew 6:14 14 “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.”

68. Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short...”

69. First John 1:9

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Summary

Experiencing spiritual life requires two things. The first thing it requires is that we be forgiven for all sin. We obtain forgiveness by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin. It is a free gift.<sup>70</sup> It has to be a free gift because the wages of sin is eternal death<sup>71</sup> and if we paid that price we would be eternally dead.

The second thing is obedience to Christ's Word (scripture). Choices are righteous because they are often made in the face of adversity and temptation. It is because of this that fruit-bearing is meaningful and significant. Bearing the fruit of righteousness is God's stated reason for creating us.<sup>72</sup>

We come to know God by yielding our will to His because when we do He discloses Himself to us.<sup>73</sup> Knowing Him is to experience eternal life *now*<sup>74</sup> because Christ is eternal life<sup>75</sup> and it is His life that we experience when Christ is in us.<sup>76</sup>

Therefore, eternal life is not simply living our life forever. It is not an extension of mortal life; it is a different life altogether, a life that is *already* eternal. To receive eternal life is to receive a different life (a spiritual life), a life that has always been, a life that is eternal

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70. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

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

72. John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." See the author's *A Reason for Adversity*.

73. 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."

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

75. John 14:6 "I am ... the life"

76. 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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in both directions, a life that not only will never end but a life that never began. This is what is at stake when we sit in some church pew wondering if we are too embarrassed to walk forward. This is what is at stake now.

The scriptural analogy is a sheepfold. We are the sheep and the shepherd is Jesus. Jesus is the door to the sheepfold<sup>77</sup> and it is Jesus who gives us spiritual (eternal) life.<sup>78</sup>

Once we have been admitted to the sheepfold we go in and out and find pasture;<sup>79</sup> we drink the water of spiritual life<sup>80</sup> and "eat" the bread of life<sup>81</sup> through scripture (the Word of God<sup>82</sup>).

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77. John 10:9 "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved."

78. John 3:14,15 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes [trusts] may in Him have eternal life."

79. John 10:9b "... if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."

80. John 4:10 "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

81. John 6:50 " I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."

82. John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

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Jesus Christ is the light of the world<sup>83</sup> but He cannot be known outside of the sheepfold because knowing Him (experiencing eternal life) is a spiritual experience.<sup>84</sup> So don't expect to find Him or understand anything about Him<sup>85</sup> until you walk through the door<sup>86</sup> and experience eternal life for yourself.<sup>87</sup>

Remember that God is love.<sup>88</sup> So God is all about relationships because love is expressed in relationships. And relationships are all about communication and we communicate with God by speaking His language. God's language is righteousness.<sup>89</sup> God does not communicate through ritual, unknown languages ("tongues") or sacrifice. His language is righteousness (what we do), especially as it relates to how we deal with others. He is present with us when we are righteous and good. This is His universe and whether we like it or not, and it is moral universe where the true currency is not money and power but righteousness.

If you are someone who truly wants to find God but wonders if there is a God to find, let me say that I have been where you are. I was just as doubting as you are or perhaps more so. But I found God exactly as described here, and then I opened the Bible and I read about what happened to me.

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

84. John 1:9 "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him."

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

86. John 10:9a "I am the door..." John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

87. John 17:3 "This is eternal life that you might know God..."

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

89. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them [righteousness], he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father and I will love disclose Myself to Him." This is what knowing God is: God disclosing Himself to us.

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I was searching for something that I could not describe and trying to fill an internal void. I came to know Jesus Christ through a silly, fumbling prayer that I prayed one evening long ago telling Him that if He was really there and if He would fill the void and give me the peace that I wanted, then I would give Him everything I had—doubting all the time but meaning every word.

I had no idea that anything would happen. But it did. He came to me with His immense peace and love and He is still there. He filled the void of eternal death with eternal life. He made me new. And He will do the same for you if you come to Christ and yield to His will. All it takes is a decision to trust in Jesus Christ. After that, it is all about heart.

My time was in 1973. Your time is now.



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