

4 – “Fighting, Jesus Style” // *First Love* //

Ephesians 5:25–27; 4:25–32

Introduction

Turning 40 this week.

We are in our 4th week in a series called *First Love*. We are studying the classic passage on relationships, Ephesians 5:21–32. Eph 5:21–32 is specifically about marriage and singleness, but Paul says that marriage and singleness are really just windows into our hearts, so we’re learning principles that apply to us whatever marital status we are in.

I hope some of you married people had fun last week doing what I asked you—telling your spouse one thing that happened that day and how you *felt* about it. One wife complained that every time she asked her husband how he felt all he said was, “Hungry” and “how can you serve me?” So she’s not sure he’s actually been “getting” the point of the messages.

- And I heard that the guy whose wife had emasculated the sheep a couple of weekends ago had not given his wife a heads up that he had given me permission to share that story and so hearing her mishap told publicly last week was quite a shock to her and so, he said, they had quite a discussion when they got home from church... which brings me to this week’s subject, **conflict resolution and forgiveness**.

Conflict happens in all relationships, and marriage tends especially to bring it out.

Let me start by telling you a *pet peeve...* A lot of the talk you hear about marriage in the church is sentimental and sappy. This seems especially true at weddings. Sermons at weddings usually feel sweet and sentimental and like you are dumping saccharin in your mouth. They have about as much depth and reality as a Hallmark card.

Actual marriage is anything but sweet and sentimental. It is this glorious, burning joy; and it’s hard, harder than you ever realized—blood, sweat, and tears. It’s great and it’s terrible. It’s almost everything ***except*** “sweet.”

- Many married people, on many a-night, go to bed—after a hard day of marriage—and about the only part of this Eph 5 passage they can remember is the verse, *“This is all a profound mystery.”*

So **we’re going to talk today about conflict in marriage.**

- Let me dispel a myth: **good couples are not couples who never fight; good couples are couples who have learned to fight fairly; to fight Christianly.**
- Conflict is a part of every marriage, and every close relationship, for that matter.
 - If you’re engaged or dating and one of those starry-eyed couples who feel like, “We never fight...” Veronica and I were like that, too. How blissful it is to be young and stupid!
 - I tell couples to take the most irritated you’ve ever been with the other person, multiply it by an intensity factor of 4 and a duration of 3, and that’s a recurring reality in marriage.
- Listen: The problems that split up marriages are not usually unique problems; they are usually generic problems, but what happens is that one or the other partners don’t know how to handle conflict; don’t know how to keep minor problems from becoming major ones.

That's why I told you the first week there are no married people issues; there are only individual people issues that are brought out in marriage. There are people who know how to handle conflict well and they do it in all relationships, including marriage, and those who don't, and their marriage just reveals that.

We're going to look at two passages in Ephesians about conflict today. The first one is specifically about marriage, because, face it, that's where a lot of conflict comes to a head. But the context of the second one is simply the church; because these are principles we have to learn in every relationship.

Ephesians 5:25–27

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The context of these verses is conflict. He says the pattern for our marriages is the cross. **The cross was about our conflict with God and how God responded.**

And Paul uses that to show us **God's goal** for our marriage and his **pattern** for achieving that goal.

The goal is our sanctification (means, making something holy).

- You are learning to be more like Jesus by washing the feet of another sinner who has sinned against you; the way Jesus loved you.
- You are also helping your spouse be more like Jesus.
- The fact that you have conflict doesn't mean you married the wrong person! Quite the contrary! God's purpose in marriage is not just to make you happy with a suitable marriage partner (it is that), but also to make you both holy by giving you a laboratory to expose your sin and to teach you to love like he loves.

The pattern for achieving that goal, for both of you, is the cross. We had irreconcilable differences with God and the cross is what God did about those. That's how we must learn to respond in our marriages.

If you want to understand why conflict is there in your relationships, what God's purpose is in it, and what you should do during it, you have to understand this principle: one of God's primary goals in marriage is making you holy; his means of doing that is by teaching you to carry the cross for another sinner.

Now, let's go backwards in Ephesians, one chapter, because Paul is going to go into more detail there unpacking where conflict comes from and what to do about it, and you're going to see this same principle at work, and you should note that the context of Ephesians 4 is *not* marriage; it's just life in the church. These are principles for conflict resolution that should apply to every relationship.

I'm going to highlight 3 commands Paul gives you for "how to fight."

Ephesians 4:25–32

(Such a great and practical passage! Christian counselor David Powlison says: "In a pinch, all counseling can be done out of the book of Ephesians.")

4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

- There's the body metaphor again, but again he's not talking about marriage here, he's talking about the church.

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

COMMAND 1. "Be angry and do not sin... Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice."

Paul didn't say you never get angry, but when you do so, do so without sin, which means without "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander." That's when normal irritation has taken on a deep, burning quality—resentment, bitterness, hatred.

I want to explore for just a minute where those things come from, because it's one thing just to tell you to stop doing them. But if you don't know where they are coming from, that's like telling a dog not to bark. We've got to get down to the roots of those things and pull them up, and not just trim off the fruits with anger management techniques.

So:

Where do bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice come from?

A couple of other places in the Bible tell us this (so important!)

James 4:1–3, *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask."*

Where does your conflict come from? **If I asked you to turn to your spouse right now and identify the source of your conflict—that would be dangerous.** Most of you would have one answer: you! Most of the unhappiness and strife and conflict in my life is there because of YOU.

James says, "Think deeper." **The reason we have conflict is,** (say it) **"I'm not getting what I want."** And your spouse is in the way of you getting what you want, or keeping it from you, and that's why your anger is directed toward them.

We say things like **"It's not fair."** (which we're only concerned about, btw, when it benefits us. We never sit in a parking space we found at the mall and say, *"God, it's just not fair that I just got this space right when I came in because that other guy has been driving around for an hour..."* No, that's called that "the blessing of God." We're only concerned about fair when it benefits us.

We have things that we really want and when we don't get them and we think that our spouse has something to do with that, we start to fight with our spouse and hate them and **even, James says**, want to murder them. (*Some of you are like, 'Alright... now you are describing my marriage.'*)

- (BTW, James is writing to church people, not a prison, so murder is not just literal here but also metaphorical.
- You are keeping me from what I want so I despise you.
- This is what Paul calls '*malice, bitterness, wrath, anger and clamor*')

The problem, James says, is found in how controlling your desires are on you. Your desires have become idolatrous, which means they are so important to you that they command your emotions.

- Example: Me **fuming** at the table. Rage. What I want is control, at least in that area. My wife's lateness has kept me from going what I wanted. Now, it is right to be unhappy with her, and express that, but the rage points back to an idol.
- This could be true of not getting the **respect, or affection, or support, or tenderness, or sex** you deserve.

Nothing in you is supposed to be so important to you that it produces malice, wrath, or hatred, and when you miss out on it, and when those things are there, they point to the fact that something has become an idol.

- They are, as I have pointed out before, like smoke from a fire....
- **They should function in your life like overreaction alarms.**
- Ask: *What is it that I want bad enough I am willing to yell at, tune out, abuse or neglect to get?*
- **Where are you bitter at your spouse?** They may be at fault, but the rage and bitterness point more toward a *deeper* problem in you.

What you should do with these passions, James says, is pray about them. "You have not because you ask not." Trust God with these things and leave it with him.

I love Isa 26:3, "I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed upon you." The state of the peace in my heart reveals whether or not my mind is fixed on God.

So where do bitterness, anger, and malice come from? A. Desires that have become idolatrous.

B. Our desire to play God in exacting vengeance

When you are wronged, there is something inside of you that craves justice. A sense of justice is like a divine turning fork God put in you, and when something is unjust, especially if it involves you, you need to see it resolved. Like a piano chord that doesn't resolve. Mozart.

So when you feel wronged, you want to see vengeance poured out on the other, and you feel nigh unto deity when you are repaying the wrath. That's what makes this next verse so important:

Ro12:19 *"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."*

Paul says, "Look, justice *will be served*." Think about this: **Every sin against me will be avenged in one of two places: in hell or on the cross.** So I can leave it to God.

- Miroslav Volf. You have to believe in future judgment to forgive.

- People say, “Forgive and forget.” On one level I understand that. But on another that is impossible! How do you forget what someone did to you? Hear me out. On one level, God doesn’t forgive and forget. God is omniscient. At no point does he “forget” about anything in the sense that he can’t remember it.
- He chooses not to remember it because he poured out his anger on the cross. You’ve got to choose like that too.
- **Forgiveness is a *choice* you make not to remember the wrong because God will take care of it on the cross or in hell.**

Vengeance is *his*. So I can put away all that wrath.

See what Paul says: **“Do not let the sun go down on your wrath... and give no opportunity to the devil.” (4:26–27)** When you hold a desire for vengeance, you are giving an opportunity for the devil’s power to come into you, because you are trying to play the role of God, which is how Satan became Satan.

Listen: **Harboring bitterness is like trying to hurt the other person by drinking a cup of poison yourself.**

- Some of you have that in you! Somebody who hurt you. Left you. Broke promises. Broke your heart. Disappointed you. Now what you are left with is bitterness and malice. You need to bury that with Jesus. ***Vengeance is his.***

So, command one is to put away all bitterness and wrath... to get angry, but not sin when you do, and you do that by pulling up the roots of malice and bitterness and hatred which are your idolatrous passions and your need to play God in exacting vengeance.

Which leads me command 2:

COMMAND 2: ³² **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”**

- “As Christ forgave you.”
 - Christianity is the profound knowledge that you are **first sinner, and second sinned against.**
 - That forgiveness is supposed to be so overwhelming that you gladly and easily forgive others.
- Your forgiveness and reconciliation to God is also supposed to be such a treasure to you that everything else in your life seems trivial...
 - **John Wesley said discovering the gospel** was like learning about a rich uncle you didn’t know about who had left you an inestimable fortune: say 10 billion dollars, and as you are riding to the bank to collect it, when you get about a mile from it, one of your carriage wheels break off... do you swear and curse God? You hardly notice, skipping and running the rest of the way to the bank to collect your treasure!
 - **How much people’s grievances against you really bother you show you little you are enraptured by the gospel.**
- For many of you, the cross needs to become bigger. The reason you can’t forgive is the cross is so small in your life. It seems trivial. You need to recognize first, how much God has forgiven you of, and second, what an inestimable treasure his forgiveness is.
- If you refuse to forgive your *spouse or his or her sins, you are in effect saying that their sin against you is worse than my sin against God.*¹ Really?

¹ Mark Driscoll, *Real Marriage*, 92.

COMMAND 3: ²⁹ “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

Let your words filled with healing and grace, not hatred, malice and retribution.

- Now, in order to do this, you are going to have to believe the gospel secret: which is that grace changes people more than retribution.
 - **How did God change you? Grace.** Threats and punishment can alter our behavior, but only massive outpourings of grace can change the heart.
 - I shared with you a few weeks ago that the most profound changes in my marriage have come from Veronica showing grace to me. They did more than change my behavior, they changed my heart.
 - Yelling and negative consequences may temporarily alter the behavior of our spouse, temporarily, but they will never change our heart. Only grace does that.

Let me point out a couple of things he says on this, and then I want to give you some practical steps for applying it:

- *Notice he says: “As fits the occasion.”* There is an art to knowing what to say, when. And you want to know the #1 factor in learning that art? **LISTENING.** You are not going to know what fits the occasion until you have listened well.
 - *The American Medical Journal:* Doctors spend an average of 18 seconds...
 - We’ll get to this more in a moment, but Brad Hambrick:² “*The vast majority of communication problems are not ‘expressing’ problems, they are ‘listening’ problems.*”
- *“Speak the truth with one another.”*
 - Treating others with grace doesn’t mean you never confront them, or that you just constantly roll over and “take it.”
 - Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is to confront somebody. You care too much about the relationship, and them, to just let it go.
 - Jesus had a great teaching on this: **turning the other cheek.** People ask, “What does that mean, someone is physically attacking you and so you stand there and just keep taking it? Turned both cheeks... now what? Out of facial cheeks, so what? Bend over? Got a couple of other cheeks there you could beat on for a while.” No, the person hitting your cheek is not trying to kill you. No school of martial arts tells you to go for the cheek... the face in Jewish thought is relationship. For a Jew, having your cheek slapped is an insult. So, when it happens, you have three choices: **A. You can strike back; go for their cheek.** That is retribution. My cheek is stinging; now yours is, so I feel better. **B. You can offer them the same cheek.** Passive aggressive. Start to punish the person in small ways: silent treatment, or you quit calling them. Take it and take it and take it until you finally lose control and go postal on the person and shove them into a woodchipper... Or, you just take it and take it and take it until you feel no more love for the person with no desire to be around them. **C. Turn the other cheek:** absorb the pain and turn to them the other side of your face, in an attempt to re-establish the relationship. You’re not going for their cheek; you’re not just ignoring the evil in them... you are doing whatever it takes to re-establish the relationship.

Let me try to point for you what this looks like, practically speaking:

Stages in Grace-Saturated, Gospel-Centered Fighting: (in whatever relationship you are in)

1. Overlook whatever you can.

- You don’t have to comment on every little infraction. Choose your battles.

² From Brad Hambrick’s Seminar, *The Gospel-Centered Marriage*

- **Proverbs 19:11** *It is to a man's glory to overlook an offense.*
- **Proverbs 12:16** *The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.*
- *I always think of this in terms of tennis. You don't have to respond. Overlook what you can.*
- This would not apply to things that do lasting damage to your relationship with each other or them. Or any kind of abuse.
 - Guys, **sometimes you have speak up**... There are times I will see something in our relationship that is really damaging, but I don't want to speak about because I know there might be icicles I have to deal with for a few days... but I have to man enough to endure that because I know its best for the family and relationship. Some of you are such pansies you always just seek the peace and never confront. Speaking grace starts with speaking truth, and sometimes you have to confront!
- There are times you need to speak up and confront; and there are times just to let it go, and there's a real art to knowing the difference.
 - In the words of that immortal theologian, **Kenny Rogers**, *"The secret to surviving, son, is knowing what to throw away, and knowing what to keep. You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em; know when to walk away; know when to run..."*
- And that's all I've got to say about that.

2. Examine YOUR heart

- Even if you've been wronged, what does your anger say about *your* heart?
- Has malice, wrath, anger and bitterness snuck in?
- Mind the **smoke detectors**! Rage, malice, wrath, and bitterness always indicate idolatry, which is a **bigger problem** in your heart than whatever your spouse is doing to you.
- And this is why you need outside counsel in your life.
 - Veronica and I both have poured out frustration we have with each other to a friend and a friend has said, "That's ridiculous. You're an idiot." That's God's design.

3. Be practical in how you fight

- **Proverbs 12:18:** *"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."*
- "Rash words." Words not thought out, spoken in anger, or not given at a good time.
- Veronica and I have found it helpful to boundarize conflict within times, zones, and moods: For example, allowing an argument to begin if we are both physically tired. We have set certain rooms, certain times, off limits.
 - We will invoke what I call the **"24 hour rule."** "I promise to come back to this."
 - Now, men, you have to keep your word, otherwise you lose credibility.
- You say, "What about, 'Don't let sun go down on your wrath?' Doesn't that mean we have to deal with our anger before we go to bed? **The main point of that verse is that we need to deal with our wrath and vengeance and get it out** of our hearts. Sometimes 24 hrs helps us to separate unrighteous, selfish irritation from righteous, loving, others-centered anger.

4. Be quick to listen & slow to speak

- **Proverbs 18:13:** *"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is a folly and a shame."*
- This is exactly what some of you do, especially you men.
 - Remember the quote I gave you earlier from Brad Hambrick, our pastoral counselor? *"The vast majority of communication problems are not expression problems, but listening problems."*
- **Let me offer you some remedial help on listening (and I need these two, because I am so bad at these things):**

- **First of all, *Be a servant listener*: Seek first to understand, and only secondly to be understood!** Think of their thoughts through the lens of Philippians 2: Consider their thoughts and needs “more important” than your own. Isn’t that the opposite of the way we come into most discussions? *OK, next, if you believe that...*
- ***Don’t interrupt***. Interrupting says ‘my thoughts are more important than your thoughts.’
- ***If you don’t know what to say, ask questions.***
- ***If you still don’t know what to say, ask more questions.***
- ***If you still don’t know what to say after that, just repeat what the other person said back to them.*** Because that at least lets them know you’ve heard them!
 - Sometimes that is just what they want, and a lot of time, it takes care of 90% of the issue!
 - I didn’t learn this in my marriage; I learned it from a guy at **DELTA**. (D.E.L.T.A.; I look in there: “my man”)
- Part of this: ***Don’t give premature advice***. Because, one, you will probably misread the situation.
 - Secondly (men especially): she is not a problem to be solved; she’s a person to be heard. A lot of times she’s looking for a companion in her pain, not a solution to her problem. So don’t interrupt her and explain away her pain with Aristotilean logic: $A=b, b=c, \text{ ergo } a=c...$ *ergo* it’s really illogical that you feel hurt.
 - When you do that, I can promise you she won’t go, “*Huh. Thank you. I’m so stupid sometimes. I could have sworn I was offended, but now I see, by clear force of your logic, that I am not really hurt after all! I’m so glad you’re my husband.*”
- *The majority of communication problems are not expression problems, but listening problems.*
- ***“Listening is a skill that is most necessary when it is most difficult.”*** Much more to say on that, but if you want more, go to one of Brad’s marriage seminars or access a lot of his stuff off of our *First Love* page: summitrdu.com/FirstLove

5. Seek resolution, not victory

- Sometimes you are going to have to say, “I’m right in this and I could win it, but that doesn’t progress us toward the goal. I’m going to keep my eyes on the bigger prize and just lose this one. My goal is their sanctification, not my vindication.
- This ties back to the first principle—can I overlook this and just absorb it. If so, I should.

(this one for married’s)

6. Believe in God’s overriding purposes in your marriage

- This is so important. This got V and I through some tough times. We knew that God had obviously appointed us to be together even though we felt like we married the wrong person sometimes, and that God had a plan for our difficulties and was making something beautiful out of them!
 - **What some of you most need is the power of hope in your life. *Illus. The power of hope.*** There is a legendary experiment in which a researcher was trying to determine how long it would take a rat to drown. If you just threw them in the water, they would drown between 5 and 15 minutes. But if he took them out 2–3 times and put them back in, the rats developed a sense of hope, and some of them could swim for more than 60 hours. Changing no factor except the introduction of the power of hope gave the rats the ability to swim significantly longer than hopeless rats.³
- There is one factor that, if we could introduce it into your marriage, would do more to strengthen it than anything else, and that is **hope**.
- And that hope comes from knowing that God has a plan for your marriage, even the difficult parts of it. He knew whom you were marrying, he knew the consternation they would cause you, and he’s got a plan to make something beautiful out of you and maybe your marriage in it.

³ <http://www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/content/19/3/191.full.pdf>

- Same thing is true for single people. God has a purpose for all things, even the difficult relationship.

7. Speak grace-saturated words

- Speak words that build up, not tear down. If that is true, for every one statement about what is wrong, there will be five describing what is right and that paint a vision of the beautiful person God is making them.
- Here's a few things you will never do if you're speaking that way:
 - *You'll never demean with "you" statements.* Calling names: Names make you feel good, quickest way to alienate an enemy... Say, "You did this," not "You are this"
 - You'll **avoid saying 'never' and 'always.'** You're always this way or that way. Don't escalate it beyond the problem. "Never" and "always" basically tell the person that "you are this" and "you stink" rather than "you have done this" and "I expect more from you."
 - Avoid being **sarcastic** (Sarcasm usually functions like a knife. And it's the quickest way to turn somebody off: Remember: ***smarty had a party and no one came***)
 - Avoid being **condescending** (*to condescend means to talk down to*)
- (Women, avoid confronting your husband publicly:
 - There's nothing that shuts a man down like having his wife tear him down to someone else.)

8. Don't give up until there is no longer a chance of reconciliation⁴

- Marriage is a covenant only dissolvable by death.
- **1 Corinthians 7:10** *To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife... 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.*
- What that means if you are married to an unbeliever and they leave... you are free.
- **What if they are a believer and they leave you?** If they leave they are acting like an unbeliever and you can assume they are, even if they technically call themselves a Christian, and you are free.
- **What if they don't leave, but they have made themselves unable to be lived with?** Violent, abusive. You bring in the elders of the church. If the person won't change, then it's like they are an unbeliever and they have "left you" by being unlivable to live with, even if technically they haven't left. But you should always let the elders of your church be in on that process.
- Otherwise, stick it out. You are not biblically allowed to get divorced, and the Bible says in sin if you do. Jesus had all kinds of irreconcilable differences with us and he died for them and then we saw our wrong and changed.
- At least do this: ***Before you give up on your marriage, give the power of grace a chance.***

9. Truly forgive

- Remember: Forgiveness is a choice not to remember or bring up the offense any longer! True forgiveness says⁵:
 - *I will not think about this incident.*
 - *I will not bring it up again or use it against you.*
 - You have to think of past flaws like they are **ammunition already spent.**
 - Never get **"historical"** in an argument. "My wife gets mad and goes historical."
 - *I will not talk to others about it.*

⁴ See Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*. See also Tommy Nelson, "Paul on the Hard Questions of Marriage: 1 Cor. 7," 2005 MP3 sermon; and Tony Evans, "Malachi 2:14-16: the Covenant of Marriage," MP3 sermon, from *Strengthening Your Marriage*.

⁵ From Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*.

- *I will not allow it to stand between us or hinder our relationship*

Forgiveness should never be conditional upon their repentance.

- *“Well, I’d forgive them if they’d ask for it.”*
- Don’t confuse **forgiveness** with **reconciliation**. Reconciliation takes two people: the person who sinned has to repent and you have to forgive.
- But forgiveness only takes one person. You can forgive without reconciling. Don’t wait on the person to repent before you forgive.
- *The only alternative to forgiveness is bitterness, which is like trying to punish the other person by drinking poison yourself.*⁶

10. Do all things out of reverence for Christ

- The only way to do all of this is for the cross to grow LARGE in your life. That’s why some of you lack the ability to do this. The cross is so small.
 - If you do things as an act of service for your spouse, you will lose motivation. You have to do it for Jesus. Your spouse may not be worth it. Jesus always is.
- Maybe you say, *“Oh, Pastor J.D., I really wish my spouse were here to hear this but it’s just me...”* What can I do? They won’t respond to any of this! *Do it for Jesus.*
 - Maybe this is how you will demonstrate the glory of Christ to your neighbors: by serving Christ even when there is no pay-off in your marriage, simply because he’s worthy of it!
 - That’s God’s ultimate goal for you in everything, and the most fulfilling thing you can experience as a Christian—bringing glory to Christ.

These are the principles you are to fight with. If you both obey them, your marriage will last and will fulfill its purposes of glorifying Jesus and making you both more like Jesus.

Keep your eyes on the cross.

- You are not a good spouse; you are a sinner, and maybe you’ve realized in this marriage how fall short you fall.
- The gospel is that God has loved you anyway. When you receive that grace, and get consumed with it, that will turn you into someone who gives grace.

I am a better husband because I have been gripped by the grace of Jesus. And my wife’s forgiveness of me has only pointed me more to the forgiveness of Jesus, which has made me more gracious. Experiencing grace makes you gracious.

The cross will do more for your marriage than any amount of sermons, seminars, or Bible studies. I’ll close with the words of **Gary Thomas**: *“Couples don’t fall out of love so much as they fall out of repentance.”*

More help with this? Go to www.summitrdu.com/firstlove

⁶ Driscoll, *Real Marriage*, 95.

Bullpen:

If you refuse to forgive your *spouse or his or her sins*, you are in effect saying that their sin against you is worse than my sin against God.⁷ Really?

In fact, you'll notice that the context for most of what we learn today is Paul writing to the church, not to married people. **These principles apply to all people who have conflict, single or married.**

- **Marriage is simply a place where conflict often comes to a head.**
- This is a great opportunity for you, both to grow in Christlikeness AND in your relationship. *"The road to intimacy is paved with conflict."*
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- Using the kids as a jury. In fact, simply arguing in front of your kids should be off limit.
- True or false: Jesus confronts us about every sin. False. Some of our sins we may never confess individually. He kept his eyes on the bigger picture, our sanctification, not us admitting he's right in every situation.
- This is a great opportunity for you, both to grow in Christlikeness AND in your relationship. *"The road to intimacy is paved with conflict."* See the hope in it.
- **Proverbs 18:13: "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is a folly and a shame"**
- We should be *servant-listeners: seek to understand before being understood.*

D. James Kennedy: "I have noticed over the years in talking with people who make the statement, "I believe in calling a spade a spade" that it is always the other people's spades they are talking about. They may speak the truth, but they are about as loving as a bucketful of hydrochloric acid."⁸

The 7 "A's" of Confession:

- Avoid if, but and maybe.
- Admit specifically.
- Apologize.
- Accept the consequences.
- Alter you behavior
- Ask for forgiveness and allow time.

Speak words of grace

- Truth
- Forgiveness
- listening

Grace changes more than retribution

- Eph 5, washing of water
- it is a man's glory to overlook an offense

⁷ Mark Driscoll, *Real Marriage*, 92.

⁸ From "Communication in the Home," quoted in Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage*, 62

See Keller notes in Meaning of Marriage

MacDonald, tombstone message

Driscoll book, *Real Marriage*

See [Hambrick seminar](#)

See [Greear seminar on "communication and conflict"](#)

((Use this somewhere?

- Marriage allows you to see someone's sinfulness like never before. You don't realize how sinful someone could be until you get married. Marriage allows you to see your own sin like never before. You don't realize how sinful *you* could be until you get married.))

- We think we change people by retribution. Retribution rarely changes, just messes up you and the other person.

Illus. James Dobson tells the true story of a guy who was asked by his wife to zip up her blouse: zip, zip, zip and breaks zipper. She sees him under the car and does it to his zipper. Feeling sense of smug satisfaction goes inside and sees her husband. 'who's under car?' neighbor. He's out cold. Did what any guy does when someone touches his zipper, sat straight up! Knocked out cold!

