

# WHEN MARRIAGE AND MERCY COLLIDE

## *The Power of the Gospel in Marriage*

### **Solving Problems**

#### *A Biblical Priority for Where to Start*

*Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Brad bigney Oct. 25, 2009*

“I know some couples who think and feel so much alike that they can work together, minister together, live together, and raise children together with hardly any conflict. Well, there might be a couple like that. But it's not us... In our real life, I swing somewhere between two extremes. At one end of the pendulum's arc, I'm in wonder: 'How in the world did I get such an amazing husband?'... By contrast, when inertia and resistance are dragging us downward, I'm asking myself, 'How in the world did we get into such a mess? What happened to make us feel this kind of disagreement and unhappiness?'...

We know it is the weight of our sin that accelerates us into the seasons at the bottom. But here's the amazing, unbelievable thing—a profound mystery, as Paul says... Marriage refers to Christ and the church—every marriage, no matter how pendulum-like because of our sin; every marriage, even if the couple doesn't care anything about Jesus... The pendulum of our marriage oscillates and sometimes wobbles, but it is suspended from above and is firmly attached. By God's grace, it will not crash to the ground.” Noël Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, John Piper, pp. 9-11

### **I. Start by being More Aware of Being a Sinner than Being Sinned Against**

Ask God to help you keep three things in focus about sin in your marriage:

1. That you can see your own sin **first**...
2. That you can see your own sin as **worse**...
3. That you can see your own sin as what you need to be working on **most**!

**I Corinthians 15:9-10** “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which as with me.”

“One of the most significant problems [with couples today] is that there is no economy of grace. With all their obvious difficulties, what is most shocking is the profound gracelessness of their marriage. There is no willingness to look within and confess deep-seated sins, so they never find sweet forgiveness. There is no vertical hope to carry them in dark and discouraging times. There is no rest that comes from entrusting each other to the God of grace... As a result, their relationship is reduced to human demands, human performance, human failure, human judgment, and human punishment. There is no hope or power for change. And because they are not daily soaking in the fountain of God's grace, they do not extend it to one another.” *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp, pp. 32-33

- What about you? Are you extending it to one another?
- With every encounter between you and your spouse - are they on the receiving end of grace or law? What do they experience the most from you?

### **I Timothy 1:12-17**

There's nothing more vital for our marriage than for each one of us to regain a clear sense of *Me* as 'the worst of sinners.'

"This ongoing need for the Savior is exactly what professing Christians must hang on to. The cross makes a stunning statement about husbands and wives: we are sinners and our only hope is grace. Without a clear awareness of sin, we will evaluate our conflicts outside of the biblical story - the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross - thus eliminating any basis for true understanding, true reconciliation, or true change. Without the gospel of our crucified and risen Savior our marriages slide toward the superficial. We begin to make limp justification for our sinful behavior, and our marriage conflicts end, at best, in uneasy, partial, negotiated settlements.

But once I find 1 Timothy 1:15-16 trustworthy - once I can embrace it with full acceptance - once I know that I am indeed the worst of sinners, then my spouse is no longer my biggest problem: I am. And when I find myself walking in the shoes of the worst of sinners, I will make every effort to grant my spouse the same lavish grace that God has granted me." *When Sinners Say 'I Do'*, David Harvey, pp. 40-41

The Bible doesn't give us permission to make the sins of our spouse our top priority! The Bible calls us to suspect and inspect our own heart first.

**Matthew 7:3-5** "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log 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."

- Which are you more aware of: being a sinner or being sinned against?

## **II. Recognize that Circumstances Never Cause Sin – they Expose It**

In our relationships, but particularly in this closest relationship called marriage – God creates opportunities to first reveal and then deal with sin that is keeping us from pleasing Him.

**Luke 6:45** "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bring forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

“After I was saved, and before I was married, I lived under the mad, undaunted delusion that I was spiritually mature. Mine was a rich and largely imaginary kind of holiness. If ignorance is bliss, I was in permanent ecstasy. The infrequent examinations of my seemingly innocent heart revealed little need for improvement... then it happened. I got married and became a blame-shifter.

John Bettler has said, **‘Your spouse always hooks your idol.’** But marriage didn’t simply hook my idols; it hoisted them six feet in the air and towed them around the house. I can’t tell you how many times I thought, ‘I never had these problems before. This must be my wife’s fault.’ The truth is, I’d always been a blame-shifter it’s just that after getting married there were so many more good opportunities to express this fault!”  
*When Sinners Say ‘I Do’*, David Harvey, pp. 68-69

**James 4:1-2** “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.”

“Your spouse was a strategic choice made by a wise and loving God. Selected by Him, for you, from the beginning of the world, your spouse is an essential part of God’s rescue mission for your life. Often a spouse plays his or her part by raising the engine temperature and heating the oil. But if we’re wisely honest we will realize that God is behind it all, revealing the familiar sin so that it might be overcome by amazing grace.”  
*When Sinners Say ‘I Do’*, David Harvey, pg. 71

Circumstances never cause sin - they expose it.

### **III. Start by Focusing on Undeserved Grace rather than Unmet Needs**

- What are you focusing on most: your so-called unmet needs or evidences of God’s undeserved grace in your life every day?

“The more absorbed I am in the gospel, the more grateful I become in the midst of my circumstances, whatever they may be. Viewing life’s blessings as water in a drinking cup, I know that I could discontentedly focus on the half of the cup that seems empty, or I could gratefully focus on the half that is full...

The gospel reminds me first that what I actually deserve from God is a full cup churning with the torments of His wrath. This is the cup that would be mine to drink if I were given what I deserve each day... As for my specific earthly circumstances of plenty or want, I can see them always as infinite improvement on the hell I deserve.”

When I look at any circumstance that God apportions me, I am *first* grateful for the wrath I am *not* receiving in that moment (The empty part of the cup never looked so good!). Secondly, I am grateful for the blessings that are given to me instead of His wrath. (Life’s blessings, however small, always appear exceedingly precious when viewed against the backdrop of the wrath I deserve.) This two layered gratitude disposes my heart to give thanks in all things and it also lends a certain intensity to my giving of thanks. Such a gospel-generated gratitude glorifies God, contributes to peace of mind, and keeps my foot from the path of foolishness and ruin.” *The Gospel Primer*, Milton Vincent, pgs. 47-48

# *Applying the Doctrine of Sin to Our Marriage*

## **(A Personal Examination)**

Taken from Dave Harvey, Sermon, Celebration '95

1. We understand that total depravity makes us powerless to choose God.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. We are more aware of being a "sinner" than being "sinned against."

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. We affirm that circumstances don't cause sin, circumstances reveal sin.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. We are more suspicious of our motives than our spouse.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. We know how to repent and we regularly confess our sins to God and our spouse.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. We endeavor to "pursue" correction rather than "tolerate" correction.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. In conflict, we "assume the log" rather than the speck.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Our gospel includes the cross.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Our awareness of sin produces a gratitude and joy for God's amazing grace.

I ----- I  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10