



FOR BETTER OR WORSE: The Downs: Unholy Matrimony

Galatians 5:13-26

This morning, I want to teach you how to have a really BAD MARRIAGE! Some of you may tell me that you don't need any help with that because you are already doing a great job of it without my assistance! But, for those that want to know how to really mess up a marriage, I will do my best to help you today. Now, I want to acknowledge from the very beginning that the passage we will study today is not one that I have ever used to preach on marriage. But while it is not a passage specifically about marriage, it is about how each one of us are called to conduct ourselves in relationship with God and with others. I felt led toward this passage because it gives us such a drastic CONTRAST between what life and relationship so often IS between people on their own, as opposed to what it CAN BE with God in the middle. Let's read our entire main passage today, and then we will unpack how it applies to our marriage relationships. **Galatians 5:13-26 NIV**

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

At its heart, this passage is about the wonderful FREEDOM that Christ has given to those that receive his GRACE and FORGIVENESS in SALVATION. When you trust Christ, you rely on his FINISHED WORK for you on the cross that makes you RIGHT with God and gives you complete ASSURANCE that you are forever his.

It also gives you the POWER you need to LIVE and LOVE just as Jesus did (and does), rather than living and loving like you used to do before Christ changed you. In this passage, Paul is helping the Galatian Christians to see the DANGER of MISUNDERSTANDING or MISUSING the grace that God gives through Christ. In the first verses of Galatians 5, he is correcting those that add LEGALISM (extra requirements for salvation) to grace. In the passage we are studying, he is correcting those that would ABUSE FREEDOM by assuming that the GRACE they receive from Christ gives them LICENSE to do whatever they want. **One of the main reasons why I chose this passage is because so many people misunderstand – or outright ABUSE – the gifts of GRACE and FORGIVENESS that are necessary for all relationships. This makes for an especially MISERABLE MARRIAGE!** Thankfully, this passage also gives us the ANSWER that we need to help us overcome the SELFISHNESS and SIN that plague our hearts and relationships.

Did you see any glimpses of YOUR marriage in the passage we read? Let me highlight a few verses, and then give you the key ingredients for a bad marriage. [Galatians 5:15](#)

15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

WHEN YOU ATTACK ONE ANOTHER RATHER THAN LOVE ONE ANOTHER, YOU WILL HAVE A MISERABLE MARRIAGE.

This verse sounds like two dogs fighting one another over a bone. And truly, that is not far from the truth! I have seen marriages where both spouses bite and devour one another in order to get what they want. Lisa and I were doing this at one time in our marriage. Both of these words are about how we attack one another in order to get what we want. We can do this even when we want something that is really GOOD. [“I just want to be LOVED. I want to be CONSIDERED.”] We end up fighting for these things in ways that are absolutely COUNTER to what we are seeking! It is a “dog-eat-dog” mentality that leaves both spouses wounded and bleeding, and where only one can get his way. As Gary Smalley says, “When any one WINS, then EVERY one LOSES!” Do you always seek to get your own way? Do you have to win every argument? This is the spirit that leads to UNHOLY MATRIMONY.

***BITE - is used metaphorically of wounding the soul, or rending with reproaches.**

This is a word that refers to how we SPEAK to one another. It is harsh and unyielding. To bite someone is to CUT them with cruel words. It does not have to be done yelling and screaming. It can also be done with quiet SARCASM.

“DEVOUR” – Used metaphorically; “to exploit or prey on one another,” also, “to squander, to waste,”

This is a word that refers to how we USE one another for our own gain or purposes. It can refer to how powerful people use their strengths to take advantage of the weak and poor [“Those who devour widow’s houses.”] I think it is remarkable that it also indicates the way that it WASTES something that is precious. The Prodigal Son “wasted (devoured) his inheritance with loose living.” This is what many of you are doing with your marriage. You are wasting your spouse’s love and beauty and value by using it up for your own selfish purposes. And when you are done, you will wad them up like a used paper plate and throw them away. This is our final word:

Destroy” – “To Use up, CONSUME, Cause to DISAPPEAR, to do away with.”

What a graphic term. It is to literally use up your spouse to feed your own desires. It is marital CANNIBALISM. Does that make you as sick to hear it as it does me? Sadly, we may say that we are disgusted by this, but many of us do it to our spouse every single day! Your spouse knows when you are using him or her, even when you won’t admit it or don’t even see it. I know that you know it when your spouse does it to you, as well!

WHEN YOU INDULGE YOUR FLESH RATHER THAN SERVE YOUR SPOUSE, YOU WILL HAVE A MISERABLE MARRIAGE!

What is your flesh capable of? Do you even know? God does! This passage displays the ugliness of the flesh and its desires: **Galatians 5:19**

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

When you read those verses, you may think, “I am not like that at all!” Really? I know that these are extreme terms, but let’s examine them a bit closer to see if they describe us at times or not.

Sexual Immorality – Sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage.

Impurity – Entertaining immoral thoughts.

Debauchery – Behavior that has no restraints. Doing whatever you want.

Idolatry – Worshipping that which promises to give you what you want.

Witchcraft – [“Pharmakeia”] The use of drugs to attain an altered state.

Hatred – Hostility. Acting as an enemy. The opposite of Agape love.

Discord – Strife. Quarreling. Contention.

Jealousy – Passionate desire to have what does not belong to you. Coveting.

Fits of rage – Unpredictable and uncontrollable outbursts of anger.

Selfish ambition – Self-promotion. Always putting self before others.

Dissensions – Causing divisions. Always stirring up strife.

Factions – Self-willed opinion that disregards truth and forces people to “take sides.”

Envy – The desire to deprive another of what he has.

Drunkenness – Repeated, habitual Intoxication.

Orgies – A “party lifestyle” that throws off moral restraints.

“The like” – Anything else similar to these that disregards godliness and morals.

The whole point of this dark list is to illustrate what life looks like when we live for ourselves without God. This is also why Paul says that those that live this way are DECEIVING themselves if they think that they have been REDEEMED. Someone that lives like this is ILLUSTRATING in bold colors the fact that they DO NOT KNOW God. But let’s talk about what life is like in a marriage where one or both spouses are living this way. This is why Paul warns us about this in **Galatians 5:13** – “But do not use your freedom to INDULGE the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

To indulge your flesh is to use any (or every) opportunity you have to live for yourself and your own desires. This doesn’t sound so bad, does it? Oh, yes it does! Imagine a home where one or both spouses only live for themselves. This is what James describes in his little letter: **James 4:1-3 NIV**
1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Verse 3 shows us why God does not answer many of our requests, because they are the opposite of love! We ask so we can “consume” it for our own pleasures rather than for others. Even PRAYER becomes PERVERSION when it is for selfish purposes!

But we try to JUSTIFY our indulgences as our RIGHT, and this makes a healthy relationship IMPOSSIBLE! The only way to experience a HEALTHY, LONG-TERM relationship is to LOVE and SERVE one another. In marriage, your marital bliss only comes INDIRECTLY, when your spouse lovingly serves you of his or her own free will. This cannot be FORCED. And this is where the problem comes in. We are BROKEN people, and we see this most clearly in marriage because it is the human race’s CLOSEST relationship. That dark list of evil desires is present in every one of our hearts, and it gets really nasty in marriage.

I could go on in this passage unpacking other reasons for our miserable marriages, but I want to finish up by looking at the SOLUTION that God gives us for these miseries. When doing this, we must remember the difficult truth that, even if we have given our lives to Jesus Christ, we still have to wrestle against these dark desires as they seek to creep back into our hearts and poison our relationships. **There are 2 parts to being able to overcome these desires. First:**

YOU HAVE TO DIE! Galatians 5:24

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Some time ago, I heard Pastor Mark Gungor make a statement on a Focus on the Family broadcast that simply ROCKED MY WORLD. **He stated the truth that one cannot read the New Testament without coming to the conclusion that God wants to KILL YOU.** This is NOT because God is HEARTLESS or CRUEL. Just the opposite! Motivated by his love, Jesus taught that the only way for us to really live is for us to DIE to our SIN and our REBELLION. Face it; we are MESSED UP! And we know that the only way that we will get better is to DIE to our SELVES. This is exactly what Jesus taught in the New Testament about the Christian life. **Let me take this one step further as it relates to marriage. If you want to experience lasting intimacy with another person, then some things in you will have to die. God knew this. Marriage actually was designed to KILL YOU!**

That’s right. You and I are broken, selfish, rebellious people, and all it takes is a marriage to bring that brokenness to light! After I got married, I discovered what a self-centered, lazy, self-serving person that I am. **[Not because Lisa TOLD ME!]** Maybe you can only see how lazy and selfish YOUR SPOUSE IS right now, but that is a key indicator of just how broken YOU really are. You just don’t SEE it! If you will give this truth room in your heart, it just MIGHT bring you to a new day at home!

I want to issue a warning at this point. There are some marriages where ONE spouse is willing to die this way when the other is not. **Awful quote someone told me: “The one that cares least . . . wins.”** This is a dark, worldly philosophy and mindset, and it is DEADLY. But don't believe it! It does lead to a very LOPSIDED MARRIAGE. When one is willing to give love and forgiveness and grace to the other, but the receiving spouse never is willing to do the same, or is APATHETIC, you have a miserable marriage! The sad thing is, I almost never hear the OFFENDING spouse ADMIT that they are failing to show love and grace to the other. It is maddening. Paul Trip spoke of this in his book, So, What Did You Expect? [\[Read quote - P. 76\]](#)

We ABUSE GRACE in our marriage in a lot of ways:

- We refuse to FORGIVE our spouse when they repent and confess wrongdoing.
- We use our spouse's confession as an excuse to “hold them hostage” to guilt.
- We never confess and repent of our own wrongdoings.
- We EXPECT to be loved and served, but we do not love and serve them!
- We EXPECT to be shown GRACE when we fail, without any expectation of change!

One of the deepest forms of wickedness is using grace as an excuse for sin. [“What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?”](#) So, what is a spouse to do in cases like those above? Is despair their only option? Absolutely not! But they must put their heart and mind in the right place. This leads to the SECOND PART of what it takes to overcome the dark desires in our own soul.

YOU HAVE TO WALK IN THE SPIRIT [Galatians 5:26](#)

[25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.](#)

The KEY to VICTORY in a desperate marriage actually has nothing to do with your SPOUSE'S actions. Instead, it is in choosing to live in obedience to the Holy Spirit so that he can develop the FRUIT of the SPIRIT within you, no matter what your spouse may be choosing in this regard. And we must remember another truth about the difference between KNOWING what is right and DOING what is right. Being “under the law” means being stuck in a place where you know the right thing to do, but you are completely unable to do it. The law condemns us because it simply highlights our sinfulness without giving us an power over that sin. But in Galatians 5:17, Paul tells us that we are able to do what is right when we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. We are not left on our own!

Now, I must tell you that doing this does not automatically mean that your spouse will change and that you will finally taste that magnificent marriage that you so desire. That may not happen. You cannot force it! But you can still experience fulness of life and joy even when your marriage is less than wonderful. **Galatians 5:22-23**

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

The fruit is a SINGULAR UNITY that comes as a result of the Spirit's work within you.

- It NEVER leads to REMORSE.
- There is no law against the fruit of the Spirit
- It is a win . . . within.
- It can help to create a PATHWAY to repentance and change for your spouse.

I know that for many of you, your marriage is a mess. You do not know what to do. God's word will help you here. Stop focusing on your spouse! This is why Simon Peter's letter reminded us that our LIVING HOPE is our Savior, Jesus Christ, and not our spouse! Your victory must lie in your relationship with Jesus and your obedience to his Holy Spirit that dwells within you. If you are tasting the fruit of the Spirit listed here, then you already have much of what you are clamoring for from your spouse. You just need to rest in that and live that out as you wait on God to work in your spouse.

If you are the spouse that never really sees or admits your sin and failures, then I pray that God will use the humility and transparency of your spouse to shock you awake! May that happen soon, so that you both can experience marriage at its BEST.

Let's pray.

Great resource: [Desperate Marriages](#) – By Gary Chapman