

# Decluttering Your Marriage

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P A R T 1

## Marriage and the Clutter of Sin

*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

GALATIANS 6:1

Since this short book you are reading is about marriage, you may be wondering why I begin with a passage in which marriage is not even mentioned. However, though marriage is not mentioned here, sin is, and sin is the preeminent destructive force within marriage. People like to explain a marriage's failure by pointing to non-ethical factors like personal incompatibility, but according to the Bible, marriage is fundamentally a matter of obedience and disobedience.

On Sunday at church, it is very easy to be a Christian. You are surrounded by people who are praising the Lord and saying things that are edifying. What is so hard about

that? All you have to do is go to church once a week, put up with that for an hour and a half, and then get out. But on Monday morning, you are dealing with people who will not put their socks in a place that can be located later and who expect you to know where they are and, not only that, they have been doing this for twenty years. As you continue to get exasperated at similar various day-to-day problems, you need to consider carefully how to handle this sort of thing.

A marriage that is several decades old can grow to be wonderful, like aging wine, but it can also grow seriously unwonderful. Marriage is the best thing on earth, and marriage is the worst thing on earth. It is the best thing if you are walking under the blessing of God, but it is the worst hypocrisy, the worst stench, the worst exasperation, if it is not under the blessing of God. Marriage under the blessing of God is God's greatest earthly gift, though it is not His only gift. It is not true that if you are unmarried, God is saying, "Sorry, no gifts for you." God has gifts for people in every station of life, but we have to rank the gift of marriage right at the top, provided it is under the blessing of God.

If it is not under the blessing of God, then a person who has not received that gift has been blessed by not being in that condition. It is foolish to envy people who struggle with something. If someone is not married, then they do lack a blessing that some people have, but they also lack exasperations that those people have. (It is remarkable how unselfish you can be in an apartment all by yourself.) Of course, marriage in one sense changes who you are in certain ways, but it also simply amplifies what you are. Many

people think that when they got married, they turned into selfish people. What actually happened is they plugged the guitar into the amp and turned it up to eleven, and the selfish tune they had been playing the whole time suddenly became audible.

Marriage is a good thing or a bad thing depending on whether it is under the blessing of God. God's best gifts are the worst things in the world once they have been corrupted. Satan fell from the highest height and consequently is the worst devil. When a marriage crashes or is polluted, it becomes the most destructive thing in the world, and can mess everything up.

### **THE DAUNTING PILE**

Marriages can get badly cluttered, like a neglected garage, attic, or basement, and when things get cluttered, people do not really know what to do about the clutter. There is such a big pile that they do not know where to begin. If you have a cluttered garage, you might one day resolve to set aside a Saturday to go out to the garage and work at it all day. Then, when you go out first thing in the morning and open the garage door, all you can do is look at the pile, stare at it for five minutes, and then close the door and go back inside and pray for a fire. However, to start fixing the problem, you do not need to know anything about what is at the bottom of the pile. The only thing you need to know about is what you can see on top of the pile that you put there last week. Similarly, when you are dealing with clutter in your marriage, you need to deal with the things you know about.

The old reprobate, Mark Twain, once said, “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me; it’s the parts that I do understand.” The things that trip us up are the parts of the Bible about humbling ourselves, seeking forgiveness, and putting things right. These texts are perfectly understandable, so we retreat to obscure texts and theological issues. In John 4, while talking with Jesus, the Samaritan woman deflected the conversation from the real issue: “Hmmm. You have brought up an interesting point about my personal life, but should we worship on this mountain or on the other one?” And Jesus, having a completely different agenda for the conversation, pointed out, “You have had five husbands, and the one you are with now is not your husband.”

Ambrose Bierce was a very learned and witty reprobate, but we ought to take his definition of a Christian in *The Devil’s Dictionary* to heart: “Christian, noun. One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ so long as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.”\* Need we say more?

### “YE WHICH ARE SPIRITUAL”

Galatians 6:1 lays down some important principles for the process of decluttering any relationship, but particularly the relationship with one’s spouse.

Before we go further, if you picked up this book thinking, “At last! Help for dealing with my spouse’s sins! Here,

\* *The Unabridged Devil’s Dictionary*, ed. David E. Schultz and S.J. Joshi (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 35 [Christian, n.].



