

# **“Rx FOR MARRIAGE (AND ALL OTHER RELATIONSHIPS).”**

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**Scripture Texts: Ephesians 4:26-32; I John 1:6-10**

## **Introduction.**

*Martin Luther's* first of the 95 Theses he nailed on the Wittenberg church in 1517 was: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

Luther nailed it. The entirety of the Christian life is one of repentance.

Jesus clearly implied this when He taught us to pray saying, “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

Just as daily bread is necessary for our physical health and wellbeing, so daily repentance is necessary for our spiritual health and wellbeing.

## *We live in a Genesis 3 world.*

Sin has corrupted and polluted and infected everything in all of creation. This is a fallen world. We are all sinners and we all sin all the time, in our thoughts, words and actions. We cannot be surprised when we sin and when we are sinned against. We will hurt and offend and disappoint each other. I have sinned against you, and you have sinned against me.

But we also live in a Matthew 1:21 world, Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to not leave us in our sin. Jesus came bringing the Gospel of salvation, repentance and forgiveness.

And we live in a I John 1:9 world, if we confess and repent, God will forgive us. I John 1:9 clearly implies, repentance is an ongoing, constant work. It is the constant work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying us to convict us of our indwelling sin. So we are not without hope.

This subject has been on my mind for some time now. As a pastor I am privy to how things are going in some of our lives and relationships and marriages. As a married man I can make some pretty safe assumptions about what goes on in all our homes. As a sinful human I can make some pretty safe assumptions about what goes on in our relationships.

This morning I want to jump into the middle of all our relationships and give some Biblical counsel. If you are married think of this as a marriage counseling session, totally free. If you are in a conflict with another person, think of this as a conflict resolution session, totally free.

You have heard me say often no significant human relationship can survive without repentance and forgiveness. And that is especially true of marriage, no marriage can survive and thrive without repeated repentance and repeated forgiveness.

The issues that affect all our relationships, the issues that make our marriages difficult are not complicated, in fact, they are very simple. One three letter word. Sin.

Every marriage starts with the seeds of its own destruction, two people who are sinners living under one roof. All marriage problems at their root are sin problems. This means every marriage is in trouble if they don't recognize this fatal flaw and know what to do with it.

The problem with much marriage counseling and relational counseling is it doesn't start with the root problem. They might talk about the past, about families of origin, about personalities, about past hurts, about various symptoms of the problem, but seldom do they get to the root, sin.

Sin is the fundamental problem of all our marriages; and humble repentance is the fundamental solution. Husbands and wives must become experts in the art of saying "I was wrong. I hurt you. I am sorry, I sinned against you and I ask for your forgiveness."

This morning let's get some tools to become experts at repentance in all our relationships.

### **First, recognize and confess your sin.**

**I John 1:8, 10** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.

If we can't start by seeing the log in our own eye, if we are making excuses or blaming or pointing fingers, if we are not confessing our own sin to God, we will not be able to confess our sin to others. If we can see our own sin, we will be a long way toward solving many of our problems.

**I John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Have you ever been in a house that is really messy? And have you ever been in a house that is really clean? What is the difference between those two houses? Do you think it is that the clean house never gets messy? Of course, it does, all houses do. The difference is the amount of things picked up and put away.

If you drop something on the floor, and decide you will pick it up in a few days or months, or leave it there for someone else to pick up, what happens? Right, a huge mess, a mess so big you don't know where to start. And after a few years of that, a marriage counselor doesn't know where to start either.

Unconfessed sin is a sink full of dirty dishes. The bigger the pile the more daunting the task and the more it is put off, just making matters even worse.

As sin accumulates so do the snippy remarks, the sarcasm, the thoughtlessness, the bitterness, then the silent treatments, the lack of intimacy, and before long the mountain of dirty dishes crashes.

To switch metaphors, sin undealt with calcifies in the arteries of marriage and eventually it leads to a heart attack.

I have witnessed firsthand more than once how years of unconfessed sin have accumulated into bitterness, resentment and joylessness.

Remember king David when he sinned against God in adultery and then murder. It was a year before he came to his sense through the rebuke of a friend, Nathan. In David's prayer in Psalm 51 we get a glimpse of what his life was like during that year. It was miserable, it was joyless.

He prays, "Restore to me the joy of my salvation."

In Psalm 38, another prayer of repentance David prays:

**Psalm 38:3-6** There is no health in my bones because of my sin.

4 For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

5 My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness,

6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning.

**Acts 3:19** Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Relationships are messy, but Paul offers a simple solution.

**Do not let the sun go down on your anger.**

Start doing dishes and start doing them as soon as they are dirty. Two plates are a lot easier to clean than a hundred. Sooner is better before the dirt dries on.

In other words, keep short accounts. Literally don't go to sleep without any unconfessed sin. You don't have to solve all the problems. If voices were raised and words were said over a financial matter, the checkbook or credit card. You don't have to solve the whole financial issue, just confess your snippy, unkind words, your raised voice, repent of the words spoken, of the sinful responses to each other and decide to talk about the problem soon.

This statement perhaps as much as any in the Bible should tell us anger is a very dangerous emotion. If left untreated it can do serious damage to our bodies and our souls. To nurture a grudge is to commit both murder and suicide at the same time. It's so destructive and corrosive to us and our relationships that it should never be allowed to smolder or simmer even overnight.

This is a call to take responsibility for our anger and to take responsibility for our relationships with others, whether at home, school, work, church or in the community. This applies especially to the community of believers where we are to treat each other as brothers and sisters rather than enemies.

This is a call to live one day at a time. Let the day of our anger also be the day we deal with it. Make the day of our anger the day of our reconciliation. This is a radical new way of living for those who are new creatures in Christ. No longer will we store up or treasure or cherish or hold on to anger.

This means that Christian husbands shouldn't be sleeping on couches, because they have dealt with the anger in their house before bed time. Children should go to sleep in peace, knowing that their mother and father love them, so much so that the parents are even able to say to their children, "I have sinned against you and I am asking you to forgive me for my anger, for losing my temper, for punishing you too harshly, for not listening, for yelling."

Living one day at a time is a wonderful rule for our homes and a great example and model for children. It strengthens marriages. Let's make it a rule in our homes that no one goes to bed angry.

Sunset was the time limit for several activities in Scripture (Deut 24:12-15; Lev. 19:13; Ex. 22:26). In the OT if you took a man's cloak (outer garment) as a guarantee of a loan, you had to return it to him by sundown. Don't leave each other in the cold uncovered to the elements, by night fall cover each other up with the warmth of love and forgiveness.

Don't let the sun go down on dirty dishes. I said it is a simple solution. Do you know why something simple is hard to do? Pride, which is another sin. Humble yourself.

Why does God give this command?

### **Give no opportunity to the devil.**

We should expect conflict because we have an enemy of our souls, Satan, who is constantly trying to discourage and defeat us, to divide us and get us denying Christ. Satan is constantly attacking Christian marriage, Christian parenting, Christian churches, all Christian relationships.

How does letting the sun go down on you anger give the devil an opportunity?

Anger, hatred, bitterness, malice, are all poisons, and when left in our hearts they do great damage. When we leave them there they become tools of Satan for our destruction and the destruction of our relationships. The longer they are left there the harder it is to cure them.

Long held anger becomes a stronghold, a fortress for the devil and once that happens it's hard to dislodge from our soul.

Once Satan gets in, he starts stirring things up worse. Taking every little thing and making it bigger, sowing seeds of contempt, despising, nursing grudges, causing us to remember past words and hurts, shutting down forgiveness.

Satan tries to exploit angry situations, to make them worse, to escalate them, to stir them up. He hangs around angry people, hoping to turn mole hills into mountains; hoping to incite hatred, violence, revenge and finally broken relationships.

Anger is a snare set by Satan to entrap us and capture us to do his will (II Timothy 2:26). "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Don't let anger, hatred, bitterness take up lodging in your heart. Get rid of it, bring the blood of Jesus to cover it. Settle it, bring peace, don't go to sleep with bitter, angry, hateful thoughts. Don't send the kids to bed with unresolved anger and sin. Don't send them to school or go to work with unresolved anger. Stop everything, resolve it, then drive the kids to school.

Being slow to anger and quick to forgive outwits Satan. It thwarts his purposes, it messes up his schemes. As Paul says, "What I have forgiven...has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Cor. 2:10-11, ESV). Post two guards at the door of your heart to keep Satan out, the name of the one is "Slow to Anger" and the name of the second is "Quick to Forgive."

**Let no corrupting speech come out of your mouths.**

**Ephesians 4:29** 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.

We are sinners, we are going to sin, we are going to have fights and disagreements. So learn how to do them well, learn how to fight fair.

There are some very simple communication skills that will help us in our marriages and all our relationships. You know most of them, you have heard them before. Learn the words that help the situation, not make it worse.

Use "I" messages rather than "you" messages. Not you make me angry or you caused me to do that, but I am angry at that. Own that anger is your choice.

Avoid the words “always” and “never.” Always is never true, never is always not true. Stay focused, don’t bring up the past. Don’t interrupt. Watch becoming defensive. Talk about your feelings without being accusatory. Don’t make assumptions. No sarcasm. Repeat back what the other person has said to show you are listening and understand. Never use or threaten the D word.

Make the goal not to win, but to understand and be reconciled.

Keep confession and forgiveness simple. No flowery speeches, no long speeches, no three points of justification. “I have sinned against God and you in my anger. I was wrong and I ask you to forgive me for my sin against you.”

There are 12 words that give grace and hold a relationship together. “I am wrong.” “I am sorry.” “Please forgive me.” “I love you.”

### **Implications and application.**

My plea this morning is for all of us is to start doing the dishes, start picking up and cleaning up the messes that clutter our relationships. The Christian life is a life of repentance. I leave you with the wisdom of God.

**Romans 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

**Romans 14:19** Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

**John 15:13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

**Ephesians 4:30-32** Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, thank you for giving us a way to restore what becomes broken through sin and misunderstanding. Remove all that divides us and stirs up strife, forgive our great and many sins against you and each other. Make us restorers of right relationships, make us peace makers, and make us good confessors of sin and quick confessors of sin. By the power of your Holy Spirit, kill sin in us and kill sin between us, and helps us this week to increase in the grace of humility, repentance and forgiveness. In the name of Jesus, Amen.