

Marriage And The Gift Of Sanctification Part 2

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Well, this morning if you're visiting with us, normally we are working our way through books of the Bible, verse at a time, verse by verse, and we're the book of Hebrews, but we've taken a short break just to study what the scriptures say about marriage. Marriage to the glory of God. We'll be in that this week and again next, and then we'll be back in the letter to the Hebrews.

Turn with me to Matthew chapter 7 this morning. Matthew chapter 7. I think we all understand that conflict is, unfortunately, such a pervasive part of life in a fallen world that we often have to work hard to tune out the conflict around us just to be able to make it through a day with the right disposition. Our TVs and radios and podcasts are filled with news regarding the latest wars and political battlegrounds, Hollywood, marital disputes, and high-profile court cases.

The fallen world really is a world at conflict with itself. But it's not the conflicts out there that are the biggest concern to us. It's the conflict that happens in our own interpersonal relationships and even within our own selves.

And because conflict is so pervasive in our lives, when we are single, we often think that marriage is a way of escape. After all, every fairy tale presents love and romance as an escape from the harsh conflicts that can too easily define our other relationships.

The story goes like this. A girl lives with an oppressive mother who controls her every move. Her life is defined by rules and regulations that don't align with her preferences. And in walks Romeo from stage left. He gets her. He accepts her. He even finds the aspects about her that others criticize to be attractive. And so she runs into his arms because life with him will be an escape from the conflict and oppression that seems to characterize all of her other relationships. They get married and the camera zooms out as they kiss to seal their wedding vows and the implication, of course, is they go on to live happily ever after. And the message that we're left with is that romantic love between a man and a woman is a safe place to put your hope and for happiness and comfort and for peace.

But the scriptures tell a very different story. The Bible teaches that we are all, in fact, sinners living in a fallen world, every part of which is affected by the curse brought on by sin. And therefore, conflict is an unavoidable part of all our relationships, which means human relationships in and of themselves are not a place that we should place our hope as an ultimate source of comfort or peace.

But that doesn't mean there's no hope for our human relationships. As we've seen together, the hope for earthly relationships, including marriage, is the hope found in the person of Jesus Christ. He changes everything. He alone is worthy of our hope. And in Him, there is real unending comfort, joy, and peace. And when we center our hope in Christ, it flows downstream in such a way that it does affect all of our human relationships in the end.

And those effects are truly transformative. But the transformation that Christ brings into our lives is not primarily circumstantial. It's not that He removes all difficulty and all forms of

conflict from our lives. Instead, He uses those conflicts that we experience in our relationships to refine our character so that we are sanctified one degree after another.

Now, don't get me wrong. When two people love the Lord Jesus Christ and they give their maximum effort at obeying Christ, it does have a dramatic impact on the relationship, and conflict will lessen in that relationship, absolutely.

But it also has another wonderful effect because the conflicts that they do continue to have now by the power of Christ don't have to become an obstacle to their relationship, but actually can be used for their sanctification and the up-building of that relationship by the power of Christ.

The couple, as they are sanctified, finds that the same issues that in their early marriage used to lead to anger and coldness and bitterness which harmed their relationship, now by the power of Christ, those same issues lead them to practice the fruit of the Spirit which builds up their relationship. But the question is, how? How can we grow, not only in marriage but in all of our relationships, to a place in which we no longer sin in our conflict with one another? Well, that's what we're going to look at this morning and next week.

If you've been with us, you know that we began where we had to begin and that is that God created us for His glory and to enjoy Him forever. We saw the perfect design of marriage in Genesis 2 and the corruption of the fall and its effect on marriage in Genesis 3. We saw that the Gospel is the lifeblood of marriage. It is the Gospel that will cause marriage not only to survive but to thrive because the Gospel is transformative.

It (the Gospel) Transforms You, it Transforms Marriage because it Transforms Husbands and Wives and it even becomes an illustration of marriage. **The Gospel is illustrated by marriage.** Last week we introduced this great topic of sanctification that God actually intends to use your marital relationship as a tool in His hand for your sanctification. That is that you would be made progressively holy.

So, with that in mind, the most important thing we can do is to study this issue of sanctification and then apply it directly to our relationships. Last week we saw sanctification biblically in a couple of categories.

One, we saw **The Call To Sanctification** from Philippians chapter 2 that we are to give our maximum effort toward sanctification but also understand that sanctification is accomplished by God alone. That led us then to **The Process of Sanctification** in Ephesians chapter 4 where we learn that we are to put off sin, renew our mind with truth and put on righteousness.

Now today we are going to take those biblical principles and begin to look at how the scriptures would have us apply them in our daily life in our actual relationships. And as has been true throughout this series, while we will specifically apply these things to marriage, these really are simply biblical principles for how we live in harmony with anyone and so they apply to any relationship in your life. But I want to start by considering this question. What makes godliness difficult in relationships? Another way to say it, what most often

causes conflict in relationships? I've boiled this down to **two primary categories in our relationships that often produce challenges.**

Category number one we'll call **Our Non-Sinful Differences.** Our non-sinful differences. The truth is we don't perfectly align with any other person on the planet when it comes to our preferences, opinions, likes and dislikes. You want to go out for coffee, I want to go out for ice cream. You want to clean the house before we talk, I want to talk before we clean the house. You'd rather live on a very tight budget day to day so that we can save and take a big vacation with the family at the end of the year. I'd rather live more freely day to day and forego the expensive trip.

These are all examples of differing preferences about which neither is sinful but often these kinds of things result in sinful conflict between us. The greater gulf that exists between our preferences in these areas, the more sanctified we have to be in order not to sin as we consider them.

That brings us to a **Second Category** of difficulties we'll call **Sinful Actions and Reactions.** Sinful actions and reactions. Every earthly relationship be it marriage, parent, child, siblings, friends, every relationship involves two sinners trying to live in harmony with one another. There is no other option. That means that we are going to sin against one another. Don't allow yourself to live in a fantasy land in your mind that thinks that we can get to a place in which we never sin against each other in our relationships. We are going to do that because we are sinners.

If you think about it, if we weren't sinners, the first category that I mentioned wouldn't even be a difficulty at all because we would be able to rejoice in our differences and we would delight in preferring one another over ourselves as Philippians 2:3-4 calls us to do. In reality, there aren't two categories that cause difficulties in marriage. There's really only one. In fact, we can boil down the answer what causes conflicts between us in marriage to one three-letter word. Sin.

It's that old nemesis of sin. If you've convinced yourself that the primary difficulty in your marriage is the vast number of preferences over which you and your spouse disagree, then you're barking up the wrong tree. You might say, but pastor, you don't understand. My husband rakes his teeth across his fork every night at dinner. I've told him a thousand times that the sound of raking teeth is one of my pet peeves. And yet every night, he forgets.

The husband says, well pastor, I do admit that I've been known to rake my teeth across my fork on occasion but it's because I'm personally not a fan of burnt lips. That's my pet peeve. Forgive me, but I'd still like to be able to feel the inside of my mouth after I eat a meal. How am I supposed to take this hot soup that she serves me and get it in my mouth if I use only my lips?

Think about this. What is a pet peeve, really? A pet peeve is a preference that I hold so dearly that I believe I'm justified to sin when I don't get it. That's a pet peeve. Now is it just me, or does that sound a lot like another biblical definition for another word? It's an idol. A pet peeve is a personal preference that I've exalted to a place of such importance that I believe I'm justified to sin, which means on some level it's become an idol in my heart.

Now I'm not trying to beat you up this morning. I'm trying to help us all understand that the true heart of our difficulties in relationships is the same old nemesis of sin. But if that is true, then there's hope, because the good news of Jesus Christ is the fact that He came to deal a death blow to sin, both giving us forgiveness of sin, but also through the process of sanctification and regeneration and making us new, freeing us from the power of sin more and more in our daily lives.

So, how do we walk in that sanctification in our relationships? Well, we're going to look at **three Biblical principles this morning to help us apply sanctification to our relationships.** Principle **number one** is this. **Remove the log before the speck.** Remove the log before the speck.

This is Matthew chapter 7, verses 1 to 5. Let's read there together:

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 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."

Now, this is a familiar passage from the Sermon on the Mount given by our Lord. He begins in the first two verses with just giving a general principle about having a critical spirit. We're not to have a critical spirit to judge others by a self-imposed standard. This is not a prohibition against all forms of judgment, because the Scriptures do call us to make judgments about others in certain cases.

But for our purposes, I want us to focus on verses three to five, where Jesus says, *why do you look at the speck that's in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that's in your own eye?* Now, this is intended to be a comical and yet powerful illustration for us. The fact is, all of us naturally have the skill of seeing sins in others with much more clarity than we see sin in ourselves. And we're much quicker to justify and extend grace to our own sin than we are to the sins of others.

We all naturally tend to think that the primary reason that our relationship with someone else is in a difficult place is because of their sin against us. And therefore, we're often quick to confront that sin of others without giving adequate consideration to our own sin that's also contributed to the conflict between us. In this case, Jesus paints a picture in which a person's sin is so great and so obvious, it's like a massive wooden beam.

The Greek word here is for the kind of beam that would be used in the foundation of a house. This is a massive plank protruding from the face of this person. Their sin is so great that everyone around them can see it. Everyone sees this plank protruding from their face, and yet they're oblivious to it, either willfully or unwillingly, whether they're justifying the sin or truly blind to it. Nonetheless, there's this beam protruding from their face.

But it gets worse. Not only have they left this massive wooden beam unaddressed in their eye, they've focused their attention now on a tiny wooden splinter in the eye of their

brother. The Greek word there is for just a little piece of wood, a little thorn or a little splinter in the eye of their brother. It's at this point that Jesus adds in verse 4, *Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, and behold the log is in your own eye?*

Not only have they noticed this tiny little splinter in the eye of their brother or sister in Christ, they have the audacity to approach them with this massive beam protruding out of their face, and they try to squat down and get into a position where they can get that splinter out of the eye of the other person. It's supposed to be comical. It's ludicrous.

And yet the application of the illustration is anything but funny. Because here's Jesus' assessment. *You hypocrite.* You hypocrite. *First take the log out of your own eye, and then you'll see clearly to see the speck and take it out of your brother's eye.* Jesus' assessment of the person who acts this way is that they are a hypocrite.

So when we concern ourselves with the sins of others without first addressing the sin in our own lives, we're hypocrites. We fall into hypocrisy. We're asking someone else to do what we ourselves are unwilling to do. And because we try to help our brother in a sinful way, it's no wonder that our help only exacerbates the problem. It only makes it worse.

And this is how our flesh instinctively responds to conflict in relationships, and especially in marital relationships. Almost without fail, when you talk to someone struggling in their marital relationship and ask them what the problem is, they will spend the majority of their time relating to you the sins of their spouse. How often have we all been tempted to say something like this?

Listen, I know I'm not perfect. I'm no saint. But he, but she, because we know as Christians we're supposed to be humble and we know we're not sinless, we usually couch it with some admission of personal guilt and then spend the vast majority of the time speaking about the sin of the other person. But when we minimize our own sin and maximize the sin of our spouse, Jesus says we are hypocrites. And instead, we're to take up the mantra of Paul, where Paul says, I am the chief of sinners. He saw himself as the worst sinner in the room.

We're to take our sin and to deal with our sin as a matter of first importance. This is my chief concern. Not her sin, not his sin, my sin. And if we can crucify the fleshly urge to address the sin of our spouse or another brother before we have first examined our hearts, this is what's going to cause us to make progress in our relationships.

If you want to put forth your maximum effort towards sanctification in your marriage or any other relationship, then you've got to cultivate a genuine concern for your own sin that supersedes the concern you have for the sins of your spouse. Commit to remove the log from your own eye before you even seek to address the sins of your spouse. And when you do this, two things are going to happen. One of two things will happen.

One, once you get the log out of your eye, you may find that it was distorting your vision of your spouse so badly that when you look back at them, there actually isn't a speck in their eye at all. It was you. You had a wrong view of your spouse, and so there's actually nothing to address in them.

Or secondly, once you get that log out of your eye and you have biblical clarity and humility to see them rightly, you now have the ability to calmly and humbly with love address the sin issue that they have in a way that builds them up instead of tearing them down.

Notice, Jesus doesn't say that we're never to address the speck in our brother's eye. This is not a call for us just to ignore and forget about the sins of others. He says, *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.* It is biblical to help one another in our relationships, even in marriage, with our sin and to lovingly confront that sin, but there's a way to do it, biblically speaking.

So today, what I want to do is focus the rest of our time on how the Bible instructs us to remove the log from our own eye, and then next week we'll pair that with how do we then help a brother or sister remove the speck from their eye.

Now to do that, we need to move on to a second principle. **Principle number two, understand the source of conflict.** Understand the source of conflict.

This is from James chapter 4. Turn with me to James chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. For any couple experiencing conflict, if I could give them two passages to consider, it would be Matthew 7 and James chapter 4. Because when we put these together, it really helps us understand how to address sin in our hearts. James 4 verse 1 begins this way:

"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

The theme of these verses is simply this: Internal sinful desires inevitably lead to external sinful conflict. Internal sinful desires inevitably lead to external sinful conflict.

Now there are actually **three lessons** that we learn from these three verses but we're going to, for our sake, only focus on the first two of those lessons in verses 1 and 2. The first lesson that we learn about sinful conflict is this. **Personal lust produces interpersonal conflict.** Personal lust produces interpersonal conflict.

Verse 1. James begins with a question: What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Literally, he's asking, where does this come from, these conflicts that you have?

Now it is important for us to say that biblically not all forms of conflict are, in fact, sinful. The Bible does give authority, for example, to governments to exact justice against those who break the law. Nations are permitted to go to war in certain instances. The church is even given authority to defend against false teachers and false doctrine and to confront sin in those who live in a pattern of unrepentance. Even in our personal relationships, Jesus said, you're to love me even more than your own family members. What he meant is if it comes down to a family member says, I'm going to cut off my relationship with you, if you don't stop following Jesus, then you lose that relationship and prioritize your love for Christ.

So, there are instances in which it's not sinful for us to be in conflict, but let's be honest. The truth is, most of our interpersonal conflict is sinful conflict. It comes from what James says, are quarrels. Quarrels here, or conflicts, these are, this is actually a military term for, it can be used for physical hand-to-hand combat, or it can be used for verbal conflict, which is, of course, what's meant here. This is a picture of two Christians engaged in a verbal battle with one another.

The word **conflicts** means **to engage in heated dispute without the use of weapons. To fight, to quarrel, to dispute.** So, these are quarrels and conflicts in which the only weapon used is the tongue.

But make no mistake about it, the tongue is a very precise and effective weapon at exalting self and cutting down others. That's why Proverbs 12:18 says this:

"There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing."

We can sinfully use our tongue like a sword that slashes and slices others. What James is really describing for us is the key principle that's taught in other places, that the tongue is the instrument in our bodies that we use to express the wickedness in our hearts. There's a direct link between what you say and what you're harboring in your heart. This is why Jesus said it this way in Luke 6, verses 44 and 45:

"44 For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush. 45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

From the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. So James is teaching us here, don't miss this, that the log in our eye, from Matthew 7, is in reality a log in the heart. The log is in the heart. If you want to remove the log from your eye, from your heart, you've got to trace your sinful thoughts, words, and actions back to the source in your heart. These verbal battles that are not fought with fists are fought with well-crafted words and arguments that reveal a sinful heart.

Now we have to admit that we all can struggle with this. Don't let the term verbal battles lure you into thinking this is not something that you deal with, because perhaps your personality is not one in which you are given to raise your voice or stomp and threaten and throw things. It may not be your personal bent, although that certainly happens in households.

But perhaps this exhibits itself in different ways. These verbal battles can be much more subtle. Sometimes they're well-timed jokes or sarcasm, meant to undermine or criticize another person. We might use tactics like rolling the eyes or a loud exhale to make it clear to everyone that we are disgusted. Maybe the words we use in and of themselves are not offensive, but the tone and the vocal inflection we use are.

In other cases, we don't blow up, we clam up. We give the silent treatment around the house. And these are just a few examples of how these conflicts manifest all over the board.

But the truth is, not one of us is exempt. Sinful conflict lurks at the door of all of our hearts and all of our homes. We've got to be careful.

In order to kill these conflicts before they begin, we have to understand their source. And that's what James tells us now. Here's the source: *Is not the source your pleasures?* Is not the source your pleasures? James answers his own question with a question, but this is really a statement. He's saying the source of your quarrels and your conflicts is your pleasures.

Now, pleasures is the key word here. Obviously, there's a negative connotation in this sense of the word pleasure. It means unrestricted sinful desires. Or self-indulgent pleasure. It's akin to the word for lust in the scripture. Now the truth is, sometimes we can have a desire in the heart that is not in and of itself a sin. We may want something that the Bible even says is good, but it can become a sinful pleasure if we allow the desire for that good thing to justify sin.

Now it becomes an idol. Even a good desire can turn into a sinful desire if we sin when we don't get it. But here are some of the sinful desires of the heart that often fester within us.

- Pride, of course, which would be a desire for recognition, a desire for respect, a desire to be heard, for others to like you, or to highly esteem you, or just a desire to be right. I'm right in this, and you need to see it.
- Immorality festers in the heart and produces all sorts of sin, fornication, lustful thoughts, pornography, adultery.
- Laziness is a sin that festers in the heart, that produces a desire for a life of ease, or to be left alone, or the sense that I've earned some me-time because of all the hard work I've put in earlier in the day.
- Wealth can become a sinful desire when the desire for riches and possessions is attached to a desire for position and for power to be thought well of or for everyone to bow down and to cower to you because of your wealth and influence.
- Selfishness festers in the heart, a desire for all of life to go your way on your time schedule, and for others to accommodate and yield to your will and your perspective.

James says these interpersonal conflicts, the quarrels and conflicts that you're having, are coming from these desires that are welling up in your heart. That's the source. It's a matter of the heart. And notice that these are not passive desires, they're very active. He describes them as *they wage war in your members*. These passions are waging war. They're going to war inside your body. It's like a war in there. As your flesh and your new nature go head-to-head every day all day with these pleasures that are welling up in your heart.

So we have to understand that outward visible conflict that takes place between us in our relationships is only the fruit of internal sin. The anger and the harsh words, that's just the fruit of what's happening in the heart. We talked about it last week, but each of us in Christ we are made new, we have a new nature but that new nature is in constant conflict with the part of us that's yet to be redeemed that the Bible calls the flesh.

And that's the description of what's happening to us here. When we allow ourselves to give in to these pleasures of the heart, it inevitably results in conflict with other people. John

Calvin says it this way, he says: "... he who suffers (or allows) his propensities (his impulses) to rule uncontrolled will know no end to his lust, were even the world given to him he would wish other worlds be created for him." When you give your sinful desires their head and your heart and let them go there's no end to it.

Now that leads us to a further explanation about the source of these conflicts and a **second lesson** that James gives in verse 2. **Internal lust produces external carnage.** Internal lust produces external carnage. And he's going to use **two illustrations** that help us understand how the source of these pleasures coming out is really what causes destruction in our relationships. The first illustration we'll call **unfulfilled lust leads to murder.** Unfulfilled lust leads to murder.

He goes on to say in verse 2, *you lust and do not have*. Understand both of those are present active verbs. That means there's a continual aspect of this. Picture it this way, you've unfortunately experienced it in your life. You have a desire and it gets stronger and stronger and stronger and yet it's unmet. And the longer that desire grows and continues to be unmet, it's like it builds up within you and at some point, it's going to come exploding out.

That's the idea here. You lust and do not have. It's building, it's festering inside of you and the end result, he says, is so you commit murder. You lust and do not have and you commit murder. Now you say, hold it, hold it, I was identifying with the first line but I've never murdered anybody. I hope that's true. But what he says here really is a description of what Jesus describes in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount. This is not physical murder but this is murder of the heart. When we allow anger to fester in the heart and boil over, it's going to come out with angry words and harsh sinful speech that is murder of the heart.

So the basic idea here is a person's sinful desire wells up within them, it's being denied them and ultimately it comes out of their mouth in the form of angry speech that causes conflict.

This is a scene that plays out, unfortunately, over and over again in Holmes. Just think of it this way, an illustration.

A husband's had a hard day at work in which he's yelled at and humiliated by his boss in front of his entire team over something he actually didn't even do. All day long he tries to keep working but all he can do is mentally replay the harsh words that his boss spoke to him and the injustice of how he was treated and it festers in his heart. The drive home is a silent one externally but internally he is at war.

How dare his boss treat him that way? After all he's put in for this company. He's already underpaid and now he finds out on top of that he's underappreciated. So this battle is raging in his heart as he enters the house to find chaos.

Clothes all over the floor. Two children can be heard arguing in the other room and something smells like it's burning in the oven. How many times have I told her to set the timer when she's cooking? Does she even listen to me when I speak?

His wife, on the other hand, woke up that morning with one goal in her mind. I'm going to try to bless my husband today. She's noticed that work's been particularly stressful and so

he wants to do something to show him she appreciates him so she makes a plan for her and the kids to pick up the house and to make his favorite meal for dinner.

She spent the morning at the store. It should have taken an hour but it took two because of course there was traffic. The kids were in a bad mood and they argued the whole way there so she had to deal with that before entering into the store. She got into the store and they were sold out of her husband's favorite steak and so she had to settle for whatever they had.

She gets home and she's now behind. It's late and she begins to cook and she asks the kids to start cleaning up the house for dad. The kids get in an argument over which chore each of them are going to do and ultimately that then causes them to knock over the laundry basket and the floor is covered with clothes.

The mom then takes them to the back room to begin to talk to them but on the way she forgets to set the timer for the steak that's cooking on the stove. It's at this moment the husband walks into the house. His wife comes out of the kid's room to find him in the kitchen trying to put out the smoke and opening the doors and the windows.

As she walks into the room he says, I don't know why no one respects me in this house. I've asked the kids a thousand times to put their clothes in the dirty clothes hamper and I've told you numerous times to set the timer when you're cooking. Does anyone even think about me around here?

The wife bursts into tears and says, why do you always have to be such a jerk? She runs out of the room. They spend the night with a sense of cold tension between them and he sleeps upstairs.

Unfortunately this is the kind of sinful conflict that plays out over and over again in homes and it causes deep relational rifts that over time begin to seem insurmountable. How can we ever recover from this? But in the end the conflict was not really about the burnt steak. It was about a deeper sinful reality in the heart that went unmet that then became the justification for lashing out over the burnt steak and the clothes on the floor.

James has that same idea in mind as he moves on to his second illustration that gives the same point in a different way. **Illustration number two: Unbridled envy leads to fighting.** He says:

"You are envious and cannot obtain; "

The same idea. Present tense verb. Envy here is to have intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success. It's to be filled with jealousy.

How dare he get that promotion? How dare she get to be married when I've wanted to be married my whole life and she's never cared about it? How dare this? How dare that? That envy and jealousy builds in the heart and it festers until eventually it comes out. So you fight and quarrel. Again, deep seated pleasures that ultimately come out in a verbal argument and conflict.

I want us to bring all of this into our own lives. I want you to bring it into your living room. Married or single.

If you're married I want you to think about the most recent conflict that you had with your spouse. If you're not married, I want you to think about the most recent conflict you've had with a friend or another family member. And I want you to think about that conflict in light of Matthew 7 and James 4. We need to identify the log in our eye that contributed to that conflict and to do that we have to figure out the internal sinful desires of the heart that we allowed to fester and caused to justify sin.

So to do that in light of James 4 I've begun to ask myself this question in my own battle with sin and it's always served me well. I want to encourage you to ask yourself: what did I want that I did not get?

In that moment, in that conflict, what did I want that I did not get? What did you desire in that moment that was denied you and therefore it led you to justify a sinful response? Now as you ask yourself that question you might find it harder to answer than you originally thought. Why is that? It's because what we're talking about here are matters of the heart.

Jeremiah tells us that the heart is deceitful and wicked above all else. Who can understand it? We're desperately in need for God to search our hearts and to know us as we see in Psalm 139. Because we're talking about matters of the heart, I'm going to encourage each of us to adopt a healthy sense of self-suspicion of your own thoughts of your own emotions and your feelings.

You see our emotions and our thoughts feel friendly towards us because they're on the inside. They feel like they have our best interest at heart but often they don't because often the first voice you hear in your head and the first emotion that you feel comes not from the sanctified part of you but from your flesh. We can't trust our feelings. We can't trust our first thoughts and reactions.

The Bible says it this way in Proverbs 14:12:

"There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."

Now that's a scary verse if you've ever really thought about it. Here's a man who legitimately believes that he's doing the right thing. He's convinced of it and yet this is actually the way of death. Proverbs 16:2:

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the Lord weighs the motives."

We have a way of justifying ourselves and whitewashing our thoughts and actions but the Lord knows the true motives of the heart. But the verse that most powerfully convicts me in this matter is 1 Corinthians 4 verses 3 to 5 particularly verse 4 Paul says:

"3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. (Now listen to verse 4) 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord."

What's Paul saying? Paul is saying currently there's nothing in my conscience that's convicting me. I'm not aware that I've done anything wrong. But then he says, but that doesn't mean I haven't. Because I'm not infallible in my self-perception. God is and therefore God is the judge of me.

It's a good reminder that ultimately even our own conscience is not the final standard. The word of God alone is the final standard. The Bible is clear. We're never to sin against our conscience. If your conscience is screaming at you that you shouldn't do something, you shouldn't do it. The Bible is very clear about that. But we also should not think that our conscience is infallible. We have to educate our conscience with the word of God. What Paul is saying is the divine standard by which I judge myself is the word of God alone.

That brings us then to a third principle that's going to help us understand how do we ultimately understand why I did what I did? What is it that I wanted that I didn't get? Well here's the **third key principle: Kill sin at its root.** Kill sin at its root.

One of the reasons that it's often difficult to discern the sins of the heart is because we've trained ourselves to think about the battle with sin incorrectly. We're tempted to focus our battle almost exclusively on outward sins that are actually the fruit produced by heart sins.

Let me see if I can illustrate this for you. Consider again the couple that got in the argument in the kitchen. What if that husband feels guilty and a little bit later comes in and says something to his wife like this. Please forgive me for raising my voice at you. That was uncalled for. I promise I'll work harder to control my anger in the future.

Now that might sound like a good apology on the surface and the husband is right. He should not have raised his voice at his wife and he should not have allowed his anger to overflow on her in that way. He ought to apologize for those things. But if his battle plan for the future consists of trying only to remain calm, cool and collected, the next time this happens he's going to fall on his face.

It's because he's made the mistake of thinking that the extent of his problem is the outward manifestation of his sin. But his actual problem, according to James, are the internal lusts of his heart. So he's got to get down to the heart level. If he doesn't, it's like taking morphine for chest pain from an active heart attack. It might dull the pain somewhat but it's not going to solve the problem, and in the end, it'll kill you. You've got to get to the heart.

To successfully remove the log of sin from your eye, you have to look past the outward manifestations to the internal lusts of the heart. Then, when you kill the sin at the heart level, the outward manifestations take care of themselves.

A calm, humble heart doesn't speak angry words. An angry, prideful heart speaks angry words. But if we just focus on trying to change our words without changing our heart, it will never work.

But there's another aspect of analyzing root sins that often leads us astray and it's the universal temptation to think that the root of our problems is circumstantial. We get distracted by our circumstances. We think that the solution to our anger and our lust and our fear and anxiety is to find a way to change our circumstances. But here's the problem.

The Bible teaches that there is no circumstance on the planet that justifies a sinful response. Not one. Even when that circumstance is someone else's sin against us, even then, the Bible does not give us justification for sinning in return.

Instead, the Bible tells us this, Romans 12:17-21:

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. 20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So clearly, even in a circumstance in which a person has truly sinned against you in a verifiable way, we're not justified with a sinful response. Our Lord taught us that, didn't he? When he was reviled, he didn't revile in return. He uttered no threats.

So let's try to put all this together. Let me show you how easy it is to get sidetracked by our circumstance or to misdiagnose the real problems in our heart that are causing our conflicts. I'll put together three made-up examples that I think will help us see how we can get off base. And I want you to take the principles from these examples and then begin to use them to apply to your own relationships.

So here's example number one. I'll call it the **Saturday shopping fiasco**.

Here's **the situation**. A man's out shopping with his family one Saturday and is consistently short-tempered and rushing everyone through every store. I know this has never happened to anyone, but just, you know, assume that it's happened to somebody that you know.

Here's the **perceived root cause**. If you ask the husband what's causing this, he would say his wife is an excessively slow shopper and the children are being disruptive in a public place. And that's why he's acting the way he's acting.

But here's **the background**. There was a highly anticipated college football game on TV at exactly the same time, and the man had been eagerly planning to watch it all week. Now just insert your favorite hobby with football game. The idea is he had already made a plan, and his plans had been thwarted by the shopping trip.

So what was the **actual cause**, the sin in his heart? Selfishness. This shopping trip is interrupting my plan for the day. But until he gets to that point and recognizes this actually is a heart problem that I'm having, not my circumstance, he's going to continue to be short-tempered. He's going to continue to rush everyone through the process.

Example number two. **The messy room diversion**.

Here's **the situation**. A man or woman lashes out in anger at his or her teenage daughter because of her messy room.

Here's the **perceived root cause**. If you asked him, why did you do that? Why did you lash out in anger? They would say, because of the child's continual disregard for parental instruction about cleanliness. How many times have I told her or him to clean this room?

But here's the **background**. A friend dropped by unexpectedly and made a joke about the child's messy room. This embarrassed the parent and pricked his or her pride, and it resulted in the angry outburst of the child once the friend left.

So what was the **real root cause**? Pride in the fear of man. Your sin made me look bad, and therefore I'm justifying sin against you. It's not that the messy room shouldn't have been addressed, but it wasn't a justification for sin.

Example number three. **The schooling choice mirage**.

Here's the **situation**. A husband comes home from work to a messy house and a wife who's stressed out and crying after a hard day of homeschooling. The husband responds by immediately declaring the kids will be going back to public school in the fall. This sparks a heated argument between the two.

Now, here's the **perceived root cause**. If you asked the husband, why did you respond that way? The husband is concerned for his wife's health and sanity. This is just not good for her. It's obviously she can't handle it, and it's not good for her. We're fixing it.

Here's the **background**. The husband had hoped for a quiet, romantic evening with his wife. When he walks in and sees this, he realizes it's not happening.

Actual root cause. Selfishness and possibly the idolization of the physical relationship in marriage. I didn't get what I wanted. Fix this situation so this doesn't happen again.

These are just a few examples of how we commonly fail to diagnose the real issue. And you maybe even go to friends for help over a conflict that you're having, but really, if there wasn't the sin in the heart, you'd be able to talk through the issue. What you have to address is the sin that's festering in the heart, and then these conflicts will be much easier to work through. They may not even be conflicts at all.

Now what I've done this morning is, I really, really want to help us at a very practical level, because this is where we live. All of us live in this. This is real life. And we want to honor Christ in these things. So I've put together some worksheets for you. If you want to put in the work and do your maximum effort, these will help you.

This is a worksheet I've called **Conflict Analysis**, and it will help you take Matthew 7 and James 4 and apply it to your situation. So take a conflict that you've recently had and just filter it through these questions of,

- What was it about on the surface?
- When did the disagreement turn into an argument? And this is an important distinction. It is possible to disagree and not argue. A disagreement just means you and I have a difference of opinion. And that's not sinful. As long as the issue is not clearly defined in Scripture, it's fine that we're different on that. What's wrong is

when that disagreement now turns into an argument. What turns a disagreement to an argument? Usually it's heat. Another word for heat is sin. You feel that heat rise up within you in the midst of that disagreement, and now we go into an argument. And so, when in that conversation did it go from a discussion about our differences to an argument? And then ask yourself the question,

- what did I want in that moment, the moment that it went from disagreement to argument that I didn't get? That's going to start to help you see what was the issue really about in my heart, and that's the sin I've got to attack, put off, renew my mind, and put on.

That worksheet is available in the back in paper form, but also on our website under the resources page.

And there are three other worksheets to go with it. So there's another worksheet called **The Log Worksheet**, which is put together by Jay Adams. And it takes Matthew 7. It's going to help you work through some questions to identify the log in your eye.

There's another one called **The Root vs. Fruit Worksheet**, which gives a list of common outward fruit sins and the inward heart sins that connect to those outward fruit sins.

And then finally, **The Process of Change Worksheet** that I mentioned last week, that's available. We're out of those in paper form this morning, but they're on the website under the resource page, and we can print more and have those available.

In addition to that, there are two small resources in the bookstore that I want to mention to you. These are little booklets, very easy. You can read these in 30 minutes. This one's on **Selfishness**, and this one's called **From Pride to Humility**. Because what you're going to find is that no matter what your conflict is about, if there's sin in your heart, there may be other sins, but there's probably at least one of these two sins, selfishness and pride. And these are great, short, easy, accessible resources for working through those issues. So just some practical resources to use.

But as we wrap this up, let me just give you three quick points of conclusion to consider.

Number one, let me challenge you this week, **Remove The Log from Your Eye**. Do the work. Will you put forth the effort at considering, regardless of your spouse and how they've contributed to the situation, how you personally have contributed sin to that relationship and brought it to the place where it is? If you're not married, just do this with another relationship where you've had conflict.

Number two, **Confess Sin to God and Others**. Once you identify that log in your eye or in your heart, humble yourself before the Lord, confess and forsake that sin to God, and then go to the person that you've sinned against and humbly confess that sin to them.

And then finally, **Make a Plan for Heart Change**. Make a plan for heart change. It's not enough to simply identify the sin. It's not enough to then even just confess the sin. We've got to put on righteousness. So make a plan. How am I going to walk in righteousness in this area and not allow my heart to fester with that sin in the future?

And as I say every week, as you go through these, you may come to the conclusion that the truth is you've never actually come to know the Lord Jesus Christ at all. And friend, if you come to that conclusion, the answer is simple. Turn to Christ in repentance and faith. Understand that your sin has separated you from God, that you're worthy of His punishment and wrath for your sin, but He's made a way through His Son, His life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. The Bible says all who repent and put their faith in Christ will be forgiven of sin and made new and given eternal life. That's where it must begin for the process of sanctification to then begin. So analyze that as well.

If you're at all concerned about whether or not you know the Lord, I'll be in the back after the service. I'd love to talk with you about that. We have a prayer room that'll be open with people that can talk to you, but please don't leave here with questions about your salvation. Let us help you with that.