

Tonight, we have come to the conclusion of our series, Lies women believe. Continuing our outline, this is lie number 5: **It's more important to be right than righteous.**

Other ways it might come out:

If it's true, I have to say it.

If I'm right, I need to get my point across at any cost.

My perspective needs to be shared and is worth fighting for.

My opinion may not always be right, but it sure is close.

Because this issue feels important, it feels significant, therefore it is.

As we begin tonight, take a look at Ephesians 4:1-3, **“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”**

So there is a manner of living that is consistent with the gospel and a manner of living that is inconsistent with the gospel. What is the worthy manner?

Notice it has to do with relational harmony. Verse 2, **“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,<sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

There is a unity of the Spirit all believers share in, and all believers are called to preserve. And that unity is not only a *doctrinal* unity, but also a *demeanor* unity. As we see here in Ephesians 4.

Humility, gentleness with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. Which means we will be prone to be proud, impatient, intolerant and unmerciful when it comes to sins or mere differences, and unloving.

And as I've stated a few times throughout this series, these are lies and vulnerabilities that are not necessarily limited to women. But we are going to narrow in on women for several reasons:

First, you're my audience tonight.

Secondly, let me turn to Pastor Jerry Wragg, who said this: “Women are wonderfully gifted, highly resilient, and relationally engaging. With such strengths come tendencies toward prideful condescension, lack of compassion, and strong opinions.”

So there are some unique vulnerabilities in women when it comes to this.

And then thirdly, it was two women in the church in Philippi, who were more concerned about being right than righteous.

More concerned about their own preferences and opinions rather than being godly.

Our first passage for tonight is Philippians 4:2-3, as Paul appeals to these two ladies in relational conflict.

Verse 2, **“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche ...”**

Two ladies are highlighted here, by *name*. And let’s remember that this was an actual historical church with real people attending it. And these letters would have been read out loud to the entire congregation.

Imagine what it looked like when the person reading this letter to the church for the first time got almost to the very end of the letter and then he read the names of these two ladies as Paul urged them both to stop threatening the unity of the church and reconcile their differences.

What a public and yet appropriate shame would have come upon them at that very moment. What is the issue here? What are they having difficulty with? What’s the disagreement over?

Notice what Paul urges them to do: **“to live in harmony in the Lord.”** Literally, the text says, **“to think the same in the Lord.”** **“To have the same mind.”**

And if you’re familiar with Philippians you know that this concept is a common theme in this letter.

Glance back at 1:27, **“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;**

It shows up again a few verses later in 2:2, **“make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**

Skip down to verse 5, **“Have this attitude (have this mind) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”**

And so, by the time we get to chapter 4, we can understand at part of why Paul has been emphasizing this very theme so much - he is paving the way for this very public exhortation right here in chapter 4.

These ladies were in some way manifesting pride, a lack of humility, considering themselves and their own cause as more significant than the other.

So, Paul appeals to each one of them with a particular goal in mind: **“to think the same in the Lord.”** This is unity, a state of oneness. Be at one in your attitude, your goal, your focus. Notice, in this particular passage, it’s not a doctrinal issue. We’re going to go to another passage later that does have to do with doctrine. But that’s not the issue here.

It’s not a matter of who’s on the side of the truth and who is in error. Paul doesn’t take a side and he doesn’t even mention the issue or issues that they were dividing over.

He places the same responsibility on both of them: Notice the appeal again: **“I urge Euodia, and I urge Syntyche...”**

He repeats the command for both them so there can't possibly be a misunderstanding that one of them is more at fault or more in need of change than the other.

*Both of them* need to change because *both of them* are wrong. This isn't heresy, this is relational conflict. We disagree and are having a hard time getting along.

These two ladies had insignificant matters to become hills that we are willing to die on. This was pettiness.

Sin角度 against one another over things that ultimately have no significance. Things of little to no consequence in the grand scheme of things.

In other words, preferences and opinions. Sadly, the kinds of things that tend to split churches more than truth, more than actual doctrinal matters.

Just think over your church experience as a Christian – the types of problems and difficulties you've experienced or observed in the church.

How much of them have been caused by the world? Outsiders, who don't profess faith in Christ.

More likely, as you think about your experience and observations, it is in-house difficulties, between believers, and more so, often it's things of little significance that cause angst and division.

I was listening to a resource this week on where tension comes from in the church. And it was just highlighting the natural differences that exist in the church, that become the cause of offense if we aren't devoted to loving one another and being godly.

Some of us artists, others are engineers. The engineers are thinking practically and logically about life and issues, while the artists are focusing more on the beauty or lack thereof, the aesthetics.

Some are pessimists, others are optimists. The pessimists view the optimists as sticking their head in the sand and having no discernment because they seem to just find a way to make every situation positive and spin it in the best possible light. They're not realists.

While the optimists look at the pessimists and wonder why you always have to focus on some negative aspect to every situation. Is that really faith?

Then there's the stoics and the emotists. The stoics look at the emotists who have a visible emotional response to almost every situation as not having self-control over their emotions. You're ruled by your emotions.

While the emotists look at the stoics and tend to think of them as robots. Are you even alive, do you feel anything? Is your heart even beating?

Then there's the frugal verses the risk takers. The frugal view the risk takers as financially irresponsible and poor stewards of financial resources.

The risk takers view the frugal as faithless and stingy.

Then there's the introverts and the extroverts. The introverts wonder why the extroverts need to dominate every social environment they're in, suffocating everyone with social energies.

While the extroverts view the introverts as selfish, self-preserving, anti-social.

Then there's the fighters verses the flighters. Otherwise known as the compassion ones verses the exhorters. The fighters/exhorters are wondering why there isn't more exhortation happening in the church, more firm rebukes going on.

While the compassionate flighters are always thinking that something was said a little too firmly, a little too directly.

Not to mention all of these tendencies complicated in the differences between male/female, young and old.

It is not surprise when we consider these natural differences we have, coupled with our sinful nature, that we get into conflict over things like these.

Notice in all of those examples, whoever we are, that's the more righteous way to be. We will baptize our own personality and tendencies, while we demonize those who have different personalities and tendencies than us.

The point is, Euodia and Syntyche were struggling with mere preferences and opinions.

What is a preference? It is something we like more than an alternative. I prefer this, I like that. What's an opinion? A personal judgment. A personal appraisal.

In my opinion, things should look this way. In my opinion, that shouldn't have happened. In my opinion, no one should let their kids do that.

It is natural to have preferences and opinions. There is nothing sinful or dishonoring to the Lord in having preferences and opinions.

The issue is when we start to confuse those things with God's will. We baptize them, giving them a kind of moral significance that they don't have, even elevating them to a point of authority.

This is the fool in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 12:15, **“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”**

The fool assumes and demands he is right and all others are wrong, irrespective of who they are. Stubbornly digging in with his own unwarranted perspective.

Proverbs 18:2, **“A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind.**

**ESV: but only in expressing his opinions.** [[see also Romans 14:1]]

A fool has no interest in listening or learning.

Commentator John Kitchen writes, “the fool to his own shame has only a perverse interest in exposing himself - in this case - his thoughts, feelings, opinions, musings and vaunted insights.”

“He lives in a delusional world where he always has the key insight and always inspires and informs yours.” [[see also Proverbs 26:16]]

Paul Tripp writes this, “foolishness believes there is no perspective, insight, theory, or truth more reliable than our own. It buys into the lie that we know better. It causes us to distort reality and live in worlds of our own making. It is as if we look at life through a carnival mirror, convinced that we see clearly.”

These are the things we are vulnerable to when it comes to our preferences and opinions.

Our own personal appraisals, our own personal judgments are just that. They are personal. They are not binding on others, they certainly have no authority for others.

But when we have a high view of self, and are lacking in humility and love, we tend to *deify* those things. We will tend to view people who have different preferences as inferior to us in some way.

We will tend to view people who have different opinions as wrong, or in sin. Failing to recognize that we have confused our own opinions with God’s will.

And so, when it comes to preferences and opinions it’s not too difficult to understand what kinds of issues caused this division between these two ladies.

Just think about how it happens today, all the things in the realm of preferences and opinions.

Education for our children.

What we allow our children to eat.

Lifestyle choices, like entertainment and hobbies.

How you keep your home – how organized and clean it is.

How you dress and carry yourself.

These are sadly examples of things that cause animosity toward one another in the church.

When that happens, it's nothing more than a combination of pettiness and pride.

Whatever the issue was in this historical context, Paul appeals to both of them on equal grounds. ***“to live in harmony in the Lord.” “to think the same in the Lord.”***

Now, let's not misunderstand Paul's words here to mean that we check our own individual preferences, personalities, and opinions at the door.

In other words, when it comes to the church and God's people everyone has to agree and like and prefer the same things. And everyone has to have the same opinions.

In fact, we already know that's not what he's saying because that would be impossible for these two ladies. They disagree about something and he's not saying you need to figure out whose perspective is better and adopt that one.

No, that's *uniformity* not unity. Uniformity is not a biblical concept. It's not evil, it's just not for the church. That is for the military, your preferences and opinions don't matter at all.

Everyone has the same haircut, the same clothes, the same meals, the same bed time, the same privileges, everything is the same, it's uniform.

But Paul is not teaching uniformity for the church here, he's rather teaching us unity, which is a particular *mindset, an attitude of oneness moving toward a common goal.*

It doesn't mean you stop being an individual with your own opinions and preferences, but it does mean that when it comes to life in the body of Christ, your individual preferences, your opinions *should be subject to this attitude, this mindset, this humility.*

It means that for the sake of Christ and the unity of his church, I love to defer and consider other people as more significant than myself.

I don't insist on what feels right or seems right to me, or what I prefer, but rather what is best for the church and the promotion of the gospel.

All *non-doctrinal division* in church life can be traced back to individuals more concerned with their own kingdom than Christ's kingdom. They simply want their own way.

Unity doesn't mean that you have to prefer or like everything everybody is doing, and agree with their preferences and opinions. But it is to say that you are obligated to hold your differences in a spirit of humility. And that love should dominate your relationships.

So, notice back in 4:2 Paul references Christ as the bond that will ensure this unity: "live in harmony *in the Lord*." Or literally, "think the same *in the Lord*."

That's important to notice because the text doesn't say, "live in harmony in yourselves." No, it's your bond *in the Lord* that will heal this strife.

You see, Paul is not under any illusion that they were going to settle this on human grounds.

You're not going to solve this merely by deciding to compromise with one another, you're not going to solve this by one of you just adopting the other one's perspective, and gritting your teeth every time you're around her.

No, those human solutions are just putting band aids on the problem. Paul says, this is to be done **"in the Lord."**

When your common bond in the Lord becomes central, your attitude toward one another will be that of Christ's on the way to the cross:

You will not cling to your own rights for your own advantage, rather you will take the form of a servant, humbling yourself for the good of the other person.

You don't have to share someone's opinion to love them and serve them. You don't have share the same preferences to consider them more significant than yourself.

In this case, Paul recognized they're going to need some accountability. Some guidance. And so Paul asks for a reinforcement to help these ladies.

Verse 3, **"Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women..."**

Paul addresses a particular individual in the congregation to assist these women in the reconciliation process.

And we simply don't know who this individual is. Paul refers to him as a genuine or true comrade, a genuine fellow worker.

Whoever it is, He is called upon to "help these women."

And this is wisdom. A godly 3<sup>rd</sup> party is especially helpful the longer the conflict has gone on because the longer it goes the deeper its roots have gone down into your heart and the harder it will be to pull them up and get you to see it objectively.

You know this in your times of relational difficulty. Maybe with a spouse, family member, co-worker: It's hard to see past the emotion, it's hard for us to see past the hurt, it's hard for us to see objectively what the issue is.

By the way, this is a helpful step if you are in the midst of difficulty with someone and you can't seem to get resolution or even identify what the issue is.

Come alongside the person you are struggling with, and tell them, "let's go and meet with so and so, we need help, we're not resolving this. And we don't have clarity."

So Paul wisely now appeals to this leader to come to their aid. And in the midst of this appeal, notice how he encourages them. He lays the foundation of their reconciliation.

We see this in the rest of verse 3, these women **"3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life."**

Notice, they were actively involved in ministry. They shared in my struggle, contended alongside me in gospel ministry, Paul says. They were not passive spectators. These were not fringe members.

And I love what he does here because it's an indirect rebuke to their pettiness.

These women have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel. And he puts them in a very honorable category.

They are in the same group as **"Clement and the rest of my fellow workers."**

Clement, just like the two ladies, is only mentioned here in the New Testament. So we know nothing about him other than the fact that he was such a significant part of Paul's ministry team that he is highlighted by name, while the other fellow workers are not.

But you can see the noble category Paul places these two women in. When he thinks of those who are fellow gospel workers, he thinks of a team of faithful individuals, which included these two women.

And he classifies them as faithful servants *who had had temporarily lost sight of something*. Not only their past ministry faithfulness. "you were at one point so passionate about the gospel that you would have never even imagined getting to a point where you could harm Christ's church with your petty, mere human differences."

You're bickering about petty things, but he's helping them see, you're not petty. You don't belong in that category.

So he's helping them see that you're too earthly minded right now, you've lost sight of why you're even in the same church, why you're doing what you're doing.



But he also reminds them of their destiny, and their acceptance before God. Notice the end of verse 3, **“whose names are in the book of life.”** That includes all of them. The ladies, Clement, the fellow workers.

The Book of life, the role of the redeemed, heaven’s register. It consists of the names of God’s elect, his chosen ones, from eternity past, written down from the foundation of the world. (Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16-17, Revelation 3:5 and then 13:8 and 17:8 for why 3:5 will never happen)

Why is Paul convinced their names are in this book? Because he knows that when he sees people suffering on behalf of the gospel, partnering with him in gospel ministry, like these women, like Clement, and the rest of his fellow workers, he is assured that God’s grace is at work.

He is assured that they are believers and so he is calling to lift your eyes to these spiritual realities and stop being consumed with your own earthly kingdom.

The church and the gospel are much bigger than you. Get back to the point where all you care about is Christ and the church.

It’s an indirect way of saying, “Is your little petty disagreement or tension with someone so important that it’s worth destroying the church and ruining your gospel witness?”

**Now you say, “that’s great, but of course we need to do that in matters of pettiness and preferences and mere opinions.**

**But what about when we actually are right, it is a matter of truth. And we’re interacting with someone who is wrong and they need to be corrected?”**

Well, let’s look at how Paul instructed Timothy to deal with those in doctrinal error. This will be our other passage for this evening. 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

Notice verse 24, **“The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition,**

And one of the keys here is the word for “servant” there. It’s the word *doulos* or slave, at its most basic level means, “one who yields himself entirely to another’s will.”

A slave doesn’t have the right to interact or respond in whatever way they want. Rather, a slave is obligated to please the master, Christ himself.

And the first characteristic that shows up is that he can’t be quarrelsome. One who is quarrelsome pictures one who is armed with words and set on destroying their opponents.

This is the person who loves the fight. Loves being right. They’re going around with their arguments loaded and ready, hoping that a particular topic can come up so they can destroy anybody who has a different mindset.

It is the person who, under the cloak of defending what is right, is actually more concerned about being right than righteous.

You're more concerned about proving your position than shepherding the other person.

As Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter has said, there is a way that we can *unsay* with our lives what we *say* with our lips.

So, instead of being quarrelsome, here's the positive side, middle of verse 24, "**but be kind to all,**"

Is that what your kids would say about you? Or that one child that really seems to push your buttons and get under your skin?

Is this what your husband would say of you?

You're kind and gentle, even when you're concerned deeply about something.

You're easy to approach instead of irritable and responding in quick-tempered, raw emotion.

And notice that devastating 3-letter word there, "**be kind to all.**" Not just those who treat you well, but even your enemies, those who oppose you.

They may not literally be your enemies, but might be acting like an enemy in the moment.

Notice middle of verse 24, "**able to teach.**" One who is able to convey God's revelation accurately and powerfully. It is the skillful communication of divine truth.

You might read that and think, "this is just for apostles or pastors and elders? After all, this is Paul, an apostle, writing to a pastor, Timothy."

Well, granted there is going to be a giftedness present in those whose primary ministry in the church is teaching.

But, you've probably noticed that there are commands placed on you in Scripture that *assume* your ability to teach at some level, even though you aren't in leadership. [[Fathers in Eph. 6:4]] Romans 15:14, "**And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish (instruct) one another.**"

Paul is under the assumption that the body of Christ is able to teach and admonish one another.

Colossians 3:16, "**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...**"

Hebrews 5:11, **“11 Concerning [g]him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though [h]by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the [i]elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.**

In the Hebrews passage, you’re actually rebuked if you aren’t growing in your ability to teach.

The assumption in the New Testament that all believers to some level should be able to teach. To clearly and skillfully convey God’s revelation.

By the way, you do have the ability to clearly communicate. Because it is on display when you are sharing your preferences and opinions.

And you can even turn into a preacher in that moment, an evangelist as you passionately recruit others to follow you and your opinions and make a case for why your ways is superior.

And so you have an ability to communicate clearly. You are instructing either way. What comes out of your heart is the issue.

You’re either conveying God’s truth to people. Or you are teaching your opinions and preferences.

What message are you clearer with? What do you have more ability and skill in defending and teaching? The Scriptures or your opinions?

Next, Paul goes back to character and demeanor, notice verse 24: **“patient when wronged,”** - the ability to bear up under evil treatment without resentment or bitterness.

An attitude of patient forbearance. Ready to endure mistreatment without retaliating.

And notice the assumption in this text: When you patiently and humbly instruct from the Word, when you are communicating the truth, you’re going to be wronged. That’s the implication.

You’re going to be laughed at, you’re going to be slandered, you’re going to be rejected, you’re going to be called arrogant, judgmental, narrow.

You’ll be discredited, insulted. You have to be convinced of its clarity, its authority, and its sufficiency or you will resolve to use mere human weapons. Fleshly argumentation and opinions.

Verse 25, it’s emphasized even further, **“with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition,”**

“gentleness” is the word often translated “humility.” A mild demeanor, not domineering. It’s not taking yourself too seriously. You have a humble spirit.

And I think the key to this humble spirit is you realize *you're not the issue*. It's ultimately not your fight, you're just the mouthpiece. The faithful instrument the Lord is using.

This word was used to speak of power under control. So you have convictions, passionately held beliefs, but at the same time you have the self-control and self-mastery to keep unhelpful emotions from surfacing and dominating.

And notice, humility doesn't mean always saying something nice and never saying anything hard. Paul says in verse 25 **“correcting his opponents.”**

That word can mean everything from informing, instructing, rebuking. Sometimes it is the humble and loving thing to do to tell someone they are wrong and need to repent.

**Now, looking at these characteristics so far, we should be asking this question:** What gives you the ability to interact like this? We know the theological answer to that: the grace of God, the Spirit of God, but what I'm asking more is this idea:

What perspective, what promise believed will enable you in the moment to interact like this when you desperately want someone to come to the truth, they're resistant, and you're tempted to use human weapons to manipulate and secure an outcome?

Notice what Paul says here middle of verse 25: **“If perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”**

The perspective you need to have is that you have zero power to change anyone. You have zero power to produce the kind of change that is necessary.

Granted, you can manipulate and resort to nagging and mere human weapons to accomplish some kind of temporary, shallow fruit.

But to produce true change in someone's perspective when they are in error, you have zero power to do that.

And it's this perspective, this awareness of God's sovereignty, that will help you be humble in your interactions.

We have to note here that the repentance of those in opposition is not *dependent* on us, but nonetheless our character and demeanor should *promote the possibility of repentance*.

And notice, it is a possibility, not a guarantee. **“if perhaps God might grant them repentance.”**

Believing this critical principle here causes us to maintain a pure message and pure method of reaching people. We can't manipulate the outcome, we can't achieve the outcome.

For people to change their mind and submit to the truth, God must work.

We see here clearly that repentance is a gift. Just like faith is a gift. They are both God's gift to the sinner, yet they are both held out to the sinner as an obligation. (Acts 11:18)

The point is, true change must come from *outside* the individual. God, in His sovereign pleasure, must work.

And notice here in this text, this *repentance* of others is the goal of our correction, or our kindness, of our humbly teaching and instructing.

In other words, why do we tell someone they are wrong in their thinking or their living? Why do we patiently and humbly instruct them, correct them, even rebuke them if necessary?

Not so we can feel better about ourselves, not so we can be right, not to win an argument, not ultimately for our comfort, but out of love for their soul. So that they would repent.

And it's interesting the order Paul puts this in here: notice it is **“repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”** (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 3:7, Heb. 10:26)

As one author said, “some things can only be known *by first passing through the door of repentance.*” (John Kitchen)

Opposition to the truth is ultimately illogical, it's inconsistent, and therefore it takes more than logical arguments to free someone from its grip.

Those in opposition must experience a change in moral disposition which leads to acknowledging and accepting the truth.

That's the order here: The acknowledgement of the truth is the consequence of a repenting heart.

That will help you in your conversations with people who are opposed to your message. There will be no acknowledge of the truth if there is no desire to repent.

On top of this, notice what Paul goes on to say next in verse 26, **“and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”**

The word “come to their senses” means to sober up, or come to one's senses again. This is equated with escaping the “snare of the devil.” This is what one author called, “diabolical intoxication.”

Hollywood tells you the devil is about scaring people in dark places. The New Testament says the primary work of the devil is blinding people to the light of the gospel. Confusing them with false doctrine. Keeping them in bondage to lies.

The solution to the problem is repentance, leading to acknowledging and coming under the truth, and when someone does that, they are no longer vulnerable to the devil's snares. His schemes.

Peter says in 1 Peter 5:9, **“resist him, firm in your faith.”** In other words, if you trust the Lord and you don't believe the lies of the world and the lies of your flesh, Satan can't have influence over you.

But if you are doubting, if you are believing lies, you are vulnerable to temptation and it is there that you are caught in the snare, the trap the devil has set for you.

And that's why the Lord's servant must be dependent on God to change people because no person is talented enough or wise enough to change an unbelieving heart, or release someone from the snare of the devil.

And so we've looked briefly at two passages that speak to the lie: it's more important to be right than righteous.

The first passage was in a context of preferences and opinions. The second passage was in a context of doctrine and truth. Matters of right and wrong.

In both of them however, we saw the common theme of humility and godliness characterizing everything we say and do.

**Now, in the remaining time we have, I want to take just a few minutes and put a little practical flesh on the skeleton of the text we just looked at.**

I want to get in to some of the reasons we have conflict with others, the areas of blindness we are prone to in our hearts when we have conflict, and some of the tendencies we might have when we are in the middle of conflict and it's unresolved.

**First of all**, those prone to relational conflict will often confuse their opinions with God's will.

And then holding those opinions so strongly that they become equal with Scripture and other people are not allowed to challenge them or act contrary to them. You're ripe for conflict when you confuse your opinion with God's Will.

**Secondly**, you will view other people as *obstacles* instead of *objects* of ministry.

In other words, you will not be concerned about building them up, helping them to trust Christ, being a blessing to them, because in relationships you are not in ministry mode, you are in manipulation mode.

People stand in the way of what you're after. So instead of serving others you will consume others by manipulating them to serve your purposes.

You'll demand that they give you the respect, love and treatment that you've convinced yourself you deserve.

**Thirdly**, you will have a secular or godless approach to relationships.

What might this look like? We're not praying for the other person's good. We're not seeking to be shown in the Scriptures where we might be wrong. We're not seeking godly counsel from those more mature than us.

We also won't recognize that the people who are a problem for us have been sent to us by God in His wisdom to sanctify us. The Lord's chosen instrument to expose our selfish tendency.

Instead, we'll view it atheistically, merely as an irritating person that I must control or get rid of. It's a godless approach to relationships.

**Fourthly**, we will personalize what is not actually personal. We will take offense at things that weren't even meant to offend us.

This is a hyper sensitivity toward the actions of others, which involves assigning impure motives to their actions.

"they looked at me wrong, they didn't say hi, they didn't invite me, they must hate me. they did that to make me feel bad."

So we will personalize things that aren't really personal.

This is bitterness. If you have people in your life and they can do no right, every action or statement of theirs is interpreted negatively by you, you have this bitterness at work.

**Fifthly**, you'll have a misguided grief about sin. What I mean by that is those in the middle of conflict or prone to it will be more offended at how other people sin against them than they are offended at their own sin against God.

What consumes their thought life are all of the perceived ways they have been wronged or sinned against and rarely if ever experience grief or mourning over their own sin.

So a misguided grief over sin.

**Sixthly**, those prone to relational conflict will settle for quick solutions that don't address the heart.

You'll avoid people. You'll just attempt to give it time and hopefully time will heal the wound. You'll ignore it and hope it goes away. Retreat from the person or the situation.

Carrying a deceit in your heart that sound like this: I've forgiving them, I just don't want to be around them.

That's not forgiveness. Thank God He doesn't forgive us like that. I forgive them, I just want nothing to do with them.

Shallow solutions that don't place any spiritual demands on your own heart.

**Seventh**, you'll believe you have an accurate view of yourself and therefore you will see your *primary problem* as being sinned against. You will commonly see yourself as the *victim* and other people as the villain.

This is a classic tendency in marriage. A husband or wife are in constant conflict and one of them seeks counsel with the motive to "fix" their spouse.

They're not seeking counsel to work on their own heart because they already see themselves as repentant, as already holy, desiring to do the right thing but just lacking clarity, and it's the other person who really needs to be counseled.

So an inaccurate view of self will be a common factor in those prone to relational difficulty.

**Eighth**, you might categorize your relational conflict as trials God gives you, instead of the consequences of your pride in relationships.

In other words, you'll think the reason you have all of these relationship problems in your life is because that just happens to be the way God is testing your faith, in a James 1 sense.

He gives some people health problems, others financial problems, but He gives me relational problems. This is just God's design for my life.

It's the guy who robs a few banks, gets arrested and thrown in jail for a few years and then views himself like Joseph in the book of Genesis.

Ok, this is the ministry God has given me now. I'm like Joseph, he went to jail and God used it for his good, it was all part of God's plan and now I'm in jail and it's all a part of God's plan.

Yes, it is part of God's plan, but you're not Joseph *because Joseph was innocent*. He was unjustly treated and put in prison. He wasn't experiencing the consequences of his sin.

But pride will blind us from that connection. We'll fail to realize that we are merely experiencing the consequences of our own pride and immaturity.

**Ninth**, you may even believe you have *exclusive* insight into what the problem is. This is inevitably what happens if you don't soften your heart in relational conflict in light of counsel and exhortation.



How does this one show up? Mature people in your life, spiritual leaders, other church members, they will all see it one way and you alone will see it an entirely different way, and you will actually believe that you are right about what the problem is when all of them are wrong.

Proverbs 26:16, **“The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can [i]give a discreet answer.**

This is the person who will use language like, “well you don’t understand. That might be true for others but it’s not true for me. Here’s why I had to make the choices I have, here’s what all of these godly people don’t understand when they disagree with my perspective.

So, an unwillingness to consider you don’t have clarity about the situation. Exclusive insight.

**Tenth**, you will justify your behavior by blaming it on circumstances or other people. “I know I did this, but you did this.” I know I got really angry but if you weren’t so hard to live with...”

So you might acknowledge where you have sinned in a roundabout way, but the attention and focus quickly goes to the reason or excuse you have for acting that way.

Certainly not an exhaustive list, but these will be some of the characteristics of those who are either prone to relational conflict or are presently in the midst of unresolved relational conflict.

**So, with these prideful tendencies looming in all of our hearts when it comes to relationships, how do we guard ourselves, how do we change?**

**How would we counsel Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord? What would that look like practically?**

**First, repentance.** The first step of repentance is confession of sin. You need to identify how you have sinned in the relationship and seek the other person’s forgiveness in *self-indicting language*.

“I sinned against you in this way. I should have acted or responded this way. Will you forgive me?” (Psalm 51)

“will you forgive me?” When is the last time language like that has come out of your mouth in a relationship with someone you struggle with?

**Secondly, resolve** to give maximal, not minimal effort at reconciliation. Demonstrating yourself innocent in the matter. 2 Cor. 7:11ff.

Resolve to love them. What does that look like? Read 1 Corinthians 13. That’s what love looks like.

**Thirdly, request.** Pray. And there are two directions of your prayer. One, is for the Lord to reveal the selfish tendencies in your own heart that led to the conflict, that led to you sinning in this relationship.

And secondly, pray for the spiritual good of the other person. Pray that God would bless them and prosper their hand in everything they do. (Matthew 5:44)

That's a great way to test your genuineness, your repentance. Can you truly seek the good of the other person? Can you truly desire for God to bless them? If not, you haven't forgiven them, you're not ready to reconcile.

**Fourthly, reflect** on the judgment you deserve from God. Meditate on the doctrine of hell and your worthiness to go there.

How will this help? Knowing God's mercy to you in Christ will help you extend that mercy to others. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

You will have a fresh awareness that no one can possibly ever offend me to the degree that I've offended God and yet, look at how God treats me.

**Fifthly, realign** your goals with Scripture. Make your goal God's goal in this relationship. God's goal is to cultivate in you humility, to make you more like Christ, to preserve unity in the church, to build up the other person, to cause you to die to yourself, to crucify selfish ambition.

So get to the answer of this question: What would you like to see happen and why? Do you want something bad to happen to the other person? Do you want to be viewed as right? Do you want them to share your preference or opinion?

So realign this relationship with God's priorities.

**Sixthly, Recognize** that you are the greatest liability in every relationship. You are the problem. It is you that needs to be fixed. (1 Tim. 1:15)

And you say, "Well, how you can know that's true in every situation?" Well, remember, Paul appealed equally to both of these ladies. This wasn't a biblical issue.

We're talking about sinful conflict here. So if you acted godly the conflict would have never happened, no matter how the other person was behaving.

Here's another reason why you know you are the problem: If Jesus was interacting with that person you find so difficult, are you saying the conflict and discord would still be present?

That the other person is so wicked and so unrighteous that they would even cause the sinless Son of God to sin against them and have fleshly conflict?

No, you're the problem. You are the greatest liability. Charles Spurgeon said this: "If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, *for you are worse than he thinks you to be.*"

Imagine how that humble mindset would transform your relationships?

**Seventhly, renounce** self-righteousness. We have to avoid being preoccupied with the other person's response and efforts at reconciliation. (Matthew 7:1-3)

Also avoiding painting our adversary in the worst light by conveniently painting yourself and your own actions in the best light.

One question I like to ask of my own heart and when counseling others: if you knew the other person would refuse to change, they would refuse to own their sin, they would never seek your forgiveness, would you still be motivated to change and work on your sin?

Or do you have the mindset of: "if I'm going to do all this work then he or she better be doing it to."

So, in order to change, obedience to Christ must be sufficient motivation for you.

And finally, **number eight, rest** in the sovereign plan of God in whatever the outcome. (Romans 8:28).

The relationship might be restored to what it once was, it might be better than it ever was, or it might never be the same.

Yes, sin can be forgiven, but sin can also leave scars, it's consequences we continue to experience this side of eternity.

So we need to be prepared to embrace the sovereign outcome of the reconciliation process no matter the results.