

Biblical Covenant Order in the Home

Restoring What Has Been Broken

Zion's Roar Holy Spirit Ministry
Bixby, Oklahoma



Book 5 - Chapter 03 – Study 01

THE ROOT BENEATH THE RUINS -

What Is Truly Destroying the Marriage?

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A Letter Before You Continue

To the husband and wife reading this together,
As I was working through the previous studies concerning marriage, covenant order, division within the home, and the ways in which husbands and wives can slowly drift apart, there was a question that continued returning to my mind. The more I considered it, the more important it seemed to become.

When a marriage begins to fall apart, what is actually causing the destruction?

Most people have an answer ready for that question. Some point to communication problems. Others point to financial difficulties, disagreements concerning children, unmet expectations, personality differences, painful experiences, broken trust, neglect, disrespect, or years of unresolved conflict. In many cases these things are real and should not be dismissed lightly. Husbands and wives can wound one another deeply. They can disappoint one another. They can fail one another in ways that leave scars that remain for years.

Yet the more I observed, the more I began to wonder whether many couples spend so much time examining the visible damage that they rarely stop to consider what may be lying beneath it.

When a tree begins to weaken, most people notice the visible signs first. They see the dying branches, the discolored leaves, or the lack of fruit. What they cannot immediately see is the condition of the roots beneath the surface. Yet every gardener understands that what appears above the ground is often being determined by something taking place below it.

Marriage may not be very different.

Over the years I have watched husbands and wives devote tremendous amounts of energy to discussing the visible problems within their relationship. They can often describe arguments in

great detail. They can recount disappointments from years earlier. They can identify the failures of their spouse with remarkable clarity. Yet far fewer seem willing to examine what those experiences may have produced within their own heart over time.

It is here that I believe many important questions are often overlooked. Most couples can clearly identify the wound itself. They remember the disappointment, the argument, the failure, the neglect, the disrespect, or the betrayal. Yet far fewer spend time examining what those experiences produced afterward.

What developed within the heart after trust was damaged?

What attitudes began to form after disappointment took root?

What changes occurred within husband and wife as those experiences accumulated over time?

These questions may prove far more important than they first appear.

As I considered this subject, I found myself thinking not only about marriages experiencing ordinary difficulties, but also about marriages that appear to have reached the end. I thought about husbands and wives who no longer seem capable of speaking without conflict. I thought about couples living separately. I thought about those who have already begun divorce proceedings. I even thought about those who have already separated and now wonder whether anything that was once broken could ever be restored.

Some may question whether a study like this has anything to offer people in such circumstances. I believe it does. Not because this study promises that every marriage will be restored. Scripture does not place the decisions of one person entirely within the control of another. Yet if hidden roots contributed to the destruction of the covenant, then identifying those roots remains important

whether a marriage is healthy, struggling, separated, or standing on the edge of collapse. Before anything can be rebuilt, it is wise to understand what caused it to fall.

For this reason, I would encourage both husband and wife to resist a temptation that has appeared throughout the previous studies. It is very easy to examine the failures of another person while overlooking the condition of our own heart. It is very easy to measure the actions of a spouse while giving little attention to our own attitudes, responses, and conduct before God.

As you continue through this study, do not approach these pages looking for confirmation of what the other person needs to change. Do not focus your attention upon what may be growing within them while neglecting to examine what may be growing within you. The purpose of this study is not to determine who bears the greater blame for the condition of the marriage. The purpose is to examine what may be lying beneath the surface and whether those hidden things have contributed to the condition of the covenant today.

The answers may not always be comfortable. In fact, some may challenge assumptions that have been held for years. Yet truth has never become less important simply because it is uncomfortable. If there are roots beneath the ruins, they must first be identified before they can ever be addressed.

Therefore, read carefully, read honestly, and read prayerfully. Ask the Lord not merely to show you the condition of your marriage, but also the condition of your own heart before Him. For if there is hope of restoration, whether for a marriage that is merely struggling or one that appears to be in ruins, it must begin with a willingness to see the truth and submit ourselves to it.

Your brother and fellow servant in Christ,

John

GOD EXAMINES WHAT MAN CANNOT SEE

One of the consistent themes found throughout Scripture is that God examines things very differently than men do.

Human beings naturally focus upon what can be seen. We notice actions, words, appearances, circumstances, and outward results. We tend to form conclusions based upon what is visible because visible things are often easier to identify and understand.

God, however, repeatedly directs His attention toward things that lie beneath the surface.

When Samuel was sent to anoint the future king of Israel, he naturally looked upon the outward appearance of the men standing before him. Yet God immediately corrected Samuel's perspective.

1 Samuel 16:7 (KJV) But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

This principle extends far beyond the selection of a king.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly demonstrates that visible actions are often connected to invisible conditions within the heart. While men frequently examine the outward conduct of a person, God examines the source from which that conduct proceeds.

This becomes important when examining the condition of a marriage.

When difficulties arise within the covenant, husbands and wives often focus first upon what can be seen. They see the arguments. They see the disappointments. They see the neglect, the disrespect, the coldness, the frustration, and the distance that may have developed over time. In some cases, they may clearly identify

a particular event that caused significant damage to the relationship.

While these things certainly matter, Scripture repeatedly teaches that visible actions often originate from something deeper.

Jesus illustrated this principle when speaking about trees and the fruit they produce.

Luke 6:43-45 (KJV) For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Notice that Christ directs attention beyond the fruit itself.

Fruit is important because it reveals something and tells us something about the condition of the tree.

A healthy tree produces one kind of fruit and a diseased tree produces another.

The fruit itself may be what we see, but the fruit is not where the problem begins.

The fruit is revealing the condition of something deeper.

This principle appears throughout Scripture. God repeatedly traces outward actions back to inward conditions. He examines not only what people do, but also what is taking place within the heart that produces those actions.

When viewed through this lens, a difficult question begins to emerge.

If harsh words are visible fruit, what produced them?

If bitterness is visible fruit, what produced it?

If emotional distance is visible fruit, what produced it?

If resentment is visible fruit, what produced it?

If division is visible fruit, what produced it?

These questions become especially important when examining a marriage that appears to be struggling or even one that appears to be in ruins.

Many couples spend years attempting to manage the fruit while giving little attention to the tree itself. They focus upon the visible symptoms while never examining what may be producing those symptoms beneath the surface. As a result, the same problems often continue returning, even after sincere efforts are made to address them.

Before we can understand the condition of the covenant, we must first determine whether we have been examining the fruit or the root.

For if Scripture is correct, and every tree is known by its fruit, then the visible condition of a marriage may be revealing something far deeper than many people realize.

LOOKING AT THE RUINS

When a marriage begins to struggle, most people naturally focus upon the things that can be seen. They focus upon the arguments that continue repeating themselves, the emotional distance that has developed over time, the loss of trust, the frustrations that seem impossible to resolve, or the disappointments that continue resurfacing year after year. These visible problems often become the center of attention because they are the things most easily identified.

When husbands and wives describe the condition of their marriage, they will often begin with these outward difficulties. One may point to communication problems. Another may point to financial pressures. Some may speak about disagreements concerning children, intimacy, household responsibilities, differing priorities, or years of unresolved conflict. In many cases, these concerns are real and should not be ignored. They affect the daily life of the covenant and can create significant strain within the home.

Yet there is a question that deserves careful consideration.

Are these things actually causing the destruction, or are they revealing that something deeper is taking place?

To better understand the question, imagine a house that has begun to show signs of structural failure. Cracks begin appearing in the walls. Doors no longer close properly. Floors begin to sag. Over time, additional problems continue to appear throughout the structure. The visible damage is important because it alerts us that something is wrong. Yet no wise builder would assume that repairing the cracks alone solves the problem. The cracks themselves are not necessarily the cause of the damage. They may simply be revealing that a more serious problem exists somewhere beneath the structure.

Marriage may not be very different.

Communication problems may reveal something deeper.

Constant arguments may reveal something deeper.

Financial conflict may reveal something deeper.

Emotional distance may reveal something deeper.

The visible problem may be real, yet that does not necessarily mean it is the root of the problem.

For this reason, it may be helpful to consider a few questions that many couples rarely ask. If communication alone is the problem, why do some couples continue struggling even after learning better communication skills?

If financial pressure alone is the problem, why do some marriages remain divided long after financial circumstances improve?

If circumstances alone are responsible for the condition of the covenant, why do many couples continue experiencing the same frustrations even after those circumstances change?

These questions do not prove that communication, finances, intimacy, parenting, or conflict are unimportant. Rather, they suggest that the visible problems may not always be the deepest problems.

As I have observed marriages over the years, I have often noticed that couples become highly skilled at discussing the ruins. They can describe the arguments. They can explain the disappointments. They can recount the failures and wounds in great detail. In some cases, they can remember events from many years earlier with remarkable clarity. Yet far fewer seem willing to step back and ask whether those visible ruins are revealing something that lies beneath them.

This becomes especially important when examining marriages that appear to be approaching the end. Couples considering separation

or divorce often spend tremendous amounts of time discussing the visible reasons for the breakdown of the relationship. While those reasons may be genuine and significant, an important question still remains. If the visible problems are all we examine, is it possible that we may overlook deeper conditions that have been developing beneath the surface for years?

Before attempting to understand how a marriage reached its present condition, it may be wise to ask whether we have been examining the ruins themselves or the hidden causes that produced them. For until that question is answered, we may spend all of our efforts repairing visible damage while never addressing the source from which that damage continues to come.

GOD EXAMINES WHAT MAN CANNOT SEE

One of the consistent themes found throughout Scripture is that God often examines things very differently than men do.

Human beings naturally focus upon what can be seen. We notice actions, words, circumstances, appearances, and outward results. We tend to form conclusions based upon visible evidence because visible things are often easier to identify and understand.

God, however, repeatedly directs attention toward things that lie beneath the surface.

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This principle extends far beyond the selection of a king. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly demonstrates that visible actions are often connected to invisible conditions within the heart. While men frequently evaluate what a person does, God examines what is taking place within the person that produces those actions.

This becomes important when examining the condition of a marriage.

When difficulties arise within the covenant, husbands and wives often focus first upon what can be seen. They see the arguments, the disappointments, the failures, the neglect, the coldness, the distance, and the visible consequences that follow. These things certainly matter. They affect the relationship and often leave

wounds that can remain for many years. Yet Scripture repeatedly teaches that visible actions often originate from something deeper.

This principle is seen clearly in the teachings of Christ concerning trees and the fruit they produce.

Luke 6:43-45 (KJV) For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Notice that Christ directs attention beyond the fruit itself. Fruit is important because it reveals something about the condition of the tree. A healthy tree and a diseased tree may appear similar from a distance for a season, but eventually the fruit exposes what is taking place beneath the surface.

This principle becomes especially important when examining a troubled marriage. Husbands and wives often become consumed with the visible fruit of the problem. They focus upon the arguments, the harsh words, the emotional distance, the resentment, the coldness, and the division that has developed over time. Yet if Christ's teaching is applied consistently, these visible problems may not be the beginning of the matter. They may instead be revealing conditions that have been developing beneath the surface for far longer than either husband or wife realizes.

For this reason, Scripture repeatedly directs our attention toward the heart. God does not merely examine outward conduct. He examines the inward condition from which that conduct proceeds. If we are to understand why a marriage has reached its present condition, we may need to look beyond the visible ruins and begin examining what has been taking place beneath them.

Before we consider the roots that may exist beneath the ruins of a marriage, another question deserves careful examination.

What happens after the wound?

What develops within the heart after disappointment, neglect, rejection, disrespect, betrayal, or years of unresolved conflict?

The answer to that question may help explain far more than many couples realize.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE WOUND?

Every marriage eventually experiences disappointment.

No husband and wife live together for years without at some point wounding one another. The husband may fail his wife. The wife may fail her husband. Expectations may be broken. Trust may be damaged. Words may be spoken that should never have been spoken. Needs may be neglected. Responsibilities may be ignored. In some cases, the wounds are relatively small. In other cases, they leave scars that remain for many years.

This reality should not surprise us.

Marriage joins two imperfect people together within a covenant. Regardless of how sincere their intentions may be, both husband and wife carry weaknesses, flaws, shortcomings, and areas of immaturity. Because of this, failures are inevitable.

The existence of a wound, however, is not the primary question before us.

The more important question is what happens afterward. *Ephesians 4:26-27 (KJV)* *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.*

When a husband feels disrespected, what develops within him?

When a wife feels neglected, what develops within her?

When trust is damaged, what begins to take shape within the heart?

When disappointment remains unresolved for months or even years, what effect does it have upon the covenant?

These questions deserve careful consideration because the original wound is often only the beginning of the problem.

Consider a physical injury. A wound may be painful, but if it is properly treated, healing can begin. If the wound is neglected, however, other problems may develop. Infection may set in. Damage may spread beyond the original injury. Over time, the secondary effects may become more serious than the wound itself.

Something similar can occur within a marriage.

A husband may clearly remember the words that wounded him, yet pay little attention to the discouragement, bitterness, or emotional distance that slowly followed.

A wife may remember the disappointment she experienced, yet give little thought to the resentment, distrust, or self-protection that gradually developed afterward.

The original wound remains easy to identify.

What grew from the wound is often harder to see.

This is one reason why many couples find themselves trapped in cycles that seem impossible to break. The original problem may have occurred years earlier, yet its effects continue producing new problems. Hurt produces more hurt. Disappointment produces more disappointment. Frustration produces more frustration. One failure creates another, and eventually both husband and wife find themselves reacting not only to the original wound, but also to everything that has grown from it over time.

As this process continues, the marriage often becomes increasingly difficult to understand. The original issue is no longer the only issue. New attitudes, new habits, new fears, and new responses begin attaching themselves to the old wound. What started as one problem gradually becomes many.

This is why two people can spend years arguing about the same situation while never addressing the deeper issues that developed

because of it. Both remember what happened. Both remember who said what. Both remember the disappointment. Yet neither may have spent much time examining what those experiences have produced within their own heart.

It is often easier to remember the wound than to examine its fruit.

Yet if the teachings of Scripture are true, this examination cannot be avoided. Christ taught that fruit reveals the condition of the tree. If that principle applies here, then what has developed within husband and wife over time may reveal far more about the condition of the covenant than the original wound itself.

For this reason, before asking who caused the damage, it may be wise to ask another question.

What has been growing beneath it?

THE ROOTS THAT GROW IN THE DARK

One of the dangers of any hidden root system is that it often develops quietly.

When a tree begins to die, the process does not usually begin with the leaves. It begins beneath the surface where few people are looking. By the time visible signs appear, the underlying problem may have been present for quite some time.

The same principle often applies within a marriage.

Most husbands and wives can identify major events that affected the covenant. They remember the argument. They remember the betrayal. They remember the disappointment. They remember the neglect, the disrespect, the rejection, or the broken trust. These events are often remembered clearly because they were painful.

What is not always remembered as clearly is what began developing afterward.

Many of the things that eventually damage a marriage do not appear suddenly. They develop gradually. They grow quietly. They take root beneath the surface while daily life continues as normal.

A husband who feels repeatedly disrespected may gradually become discouraged. Over time that discouragement may become emotional distance. The distance may eventually become indifference. What began as a wound slowly develops into something larger.

A wife who experiences repeated disappointment may begin protecting herself from further hurt. What begins as caution may eventually become distrust. Distrust may become resentment. Resentment may become a barrier that affects every part of the relationship.

Neither husband nor wife necessarily plans for this to happen.

In many cases, these responses feel justified.

The husband believes he is simply protecting himself from further disappointment.

The wife believes she is simply protecting herself from being hurt again.

Yet the heart has a remarkable ability to justify things that God may desire us to examine.

This is one reason why hidden roots can become so dangerous. They often appear reasonable to the person who carries them. The longer they remain, the more normal they begin to feel. What once would have troubled the conscience gradually becomes accepted as part of everyday life.

A husband may no longer notice how guarded he has become.

A wife may no longer recognize how much resentment she carries.

What was once a response to a wound slowly becomes part of the person's character and outlook.

Over time these hidden conditions begin influencing nearly every part of the covenant. They affect communication. They affect trust. They affect affection. They affect patience. They affect forgiveness. They affect how husband and wife interpret one another's actions and motives.

Eventually the visible problems become increasingly difficult to separate from the hidden roots beneath them.

This may help explain why some marriages continue struggling even after sincere attempts are made to improve communication or resolve particular disagreements. The visible issues may receive

attention while the deeper conditions beneath them remain largely untouched.

Scripture repeatedly warns about things that take root within the heart.

Hebrews 12:15 (KJV) Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Notice that the writer does not merely warn about bitterness itself. He warns about a root of bitterness. The imagery is important. Roots grow beneath the surface before their effects become visible. What begins hidden eventually affects everything around it.

Although bitterness is one example, it is not the only thing that can take root within the heart. Resentment can take root. Pride can take root. Self-righteousness can take root. Unforgiveness can take root. Fear can take root. Distrust can take root.

The question is not whether these things exist in other people. The question is whether any of them exist within us.

This brings us back to the question raised earlier. If the ruins of a marriage are visible evidence of something deeper, what exactly are those ruins revealing?

What are these roots connected to?

Do they all grow independently?

Or do they share a common source beneath the surface?

Before answering that question, we must first examine something that many people rarely consider.

Why do these roots find such fertile ground in the human heart?

WHY DO THESE ROOTS GROW?

At this point, an important question deserves careful consideration.

If bitterness, resentment, distrust, unforgiveness, pride, and similar conditions can develop after a wound, why do they seem to take hold so easily within the human heart?

Part of the answer may be found in the way people naturally respond to pain. When we are wounded, disappointed, neglected, rejected, or betrayed, our instinct is often to protect ourselves from experiencing the same pain again. This response can be observed in many areas of life. A person who has been deceived may become cautious. A person who has experienced repeated disappointment may become hesitant to trust. Someone who has been deeply wounded may become increasingly guarded without ever intending to do so.

To a certain degree, such responses appear understandable. Most people do not wake up one morning and decide to become distant, suspicious, resentful, or unforgiving. More often, these attitudes develop gradually over time as people attempt to navigate the pain they have experienced. What begins as a response to a wound can slowly become a settled way of thinking.

As these attitudes become more established, they begin influencing areas of life that may seem unrelated to the original injury. Communication becomes more difficult. Patience becomes harder to maintain. Misunderstandings become more frequent. Husband and wife may begin interpreting one another's actions through the lens of past disappointments rather than present realities. In some cases, the marriage slowly becomes shaped as much by previous injuries as by current circumstances.

One reason this process can be difficult to recognize is that the attitudes themselves often appear reasonable. *Jeremiah 17:9 (KJV)*

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? A person who has been wounded may view caution as wisdom. A person who has been disappointed may view emotional distance as protection. Someone who has been hurt repeatedly may feel justified in maintaining walls that were originally built to prevent further pain. Because these responses often seem understandable, they may remain largely unexamined for years.

Yet Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to examine not only what has happened to them, but also what is happening within them. The fact that a wound occurred does not automatically determine how a person must respond to that wound. Neither does the failure of another person remove our own responsibility before God. Throughout Scripture, the Lord consistently deals with individuals concerning their own conduct, their own attitudes, and their own responses, even when they have been genuinely wronged by others.

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV) Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. This principle becomes especially important when examining a troubled marriage. Many husbands can clearly identify the failures of their wives, and many wives can clearly identify the failures of their husbands. The question before us, however, is not whether those failures occurred. The question is whether those failures have been allowed to produce conditions within the heart that God never intended to remain there.

As we continue our examination, another question begins to emerge. What do bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, pride, self-righteousness, distrust, and many other destructive conditions have in common?

At first they appear to be separate problems. Yet the more closely they are examined, the more connected they seem to become. It is possible that what we have been calling roots may not be the deepest roots at all. They may themselves be growing from something deeper still.

THE DEEPEST ROOT

As we have worked through this study, several conditions have repeatedly appeared. Bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, distrust, pride, self-righteousness, and self-protection can all produce tremendous damage within a covenant. In some marriages one of these conditions may be more visible than the others. In other marriages several may exist simultaneously. Regardless of how they appear, they often leave behind similar results. Trust weakens. Communication becomes more difficult. Distance grows. Unity becomes increasingly difficult to maintain.

This raises an important question.

Are these conditions entirely separate from one another, or are they connected in some way?

The more closely they are examined, the more they appear to share certain characteristics. A bitter person often remains occupied with a past offense. A resentful person frequently returns to a past disappointment. An unforgiving person continues carrying a debt that has not been released. A prideful person becomes increasingly concerned with defending, protecting, or justifying himself. Although these conditions manifest themselves differently, they often direct attention toward the same place.

The focus remains fixed upon the injury that was received, the disappointment that was experienced, the offense that has not been forgotten, or the pain that continues to influence present circumstances. Over time, much of a person's thinking can become shaped by the effort to avoid future hurt, protect against future disappointment, or preserve oneself from further injury.

This observation does not make the original wound insignificant. Many husbands and wives have experienced genuine hurt within the covenant. Some have endured years of disappointment, neglect, rejection, broken trust, or unresolved conflict. The

purpose of this study is not to deny those realities. The wound may be entirely real.

The question before us, however, is no longer whether the wound occurred.

The question is what has developed around that wound.

As these conditions become more deeply rooted, they often begin influencing areas of the marriage that seem unrelated to the original problem. Conversations are interpreted through the lens of previous injuries. Motives are questioned more easily. Patience becomes more difficult. Mercy becomes less natural. Husband and wife may find themselves reacting not only to present circumstances but also to disappointments that occurred years earlier.

What began as a response to a wound can gradually become a settled way of viewing the covenant itself.

For this reason, many of the problems that develop within a troubled marriage begin appearing less like isolated issues and more like different expressions of the same underlying struggle.

Philippians 2:3-4 (KJV) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

The focus slowly shifts away from serving, understanding, forgiving, and sacrificing for another person and increasingly turns toward protecting, defending, preserving, and justifying oneself.

It is here that Scripture begins directing our attention toward a subject that many people would rather avoid. Throughout the teachings of Christ, one theme appears repeatedly. The path of discipleship is not built upon the preservation of self but upon the willingness to surrender self. Before we can fully understand how this principle relates to marriage, we must first examine what Christ taught concerning the place of self in the life of a believer.

THE PLACE OF SELF IN THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST

As we have continued our examination, a pattern has slowly begun to emerge. Many of the conditions that damage a marriage appear to direct attention toward the same place. The injury that was received, the disappointment that was experienced, the offense that remains remembered, and the desire to avoid future hurt all seem to exert a powerful influence upon the human heart.

This observation becomes even more significant when viewed alongside the teachings of Christ.

One of the recurring themes throughout His ministry was the issue of self. While much of the world encourages people to pursue self, defend self, exalt self, satisfy self, and preserve self, Christ repeatedly called His followers in a very different direction.

Luke 9:23-24 (KJV) And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Then said Christ unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

These words were not spoken specifically about marriage. They were spoken concerning discipleship itself. Christ was describing the path that every believer must walk. Before a person can properly follow Him, there must first be a willingness to deny self.

This is not a concept that comes naturally to human beings.

Most people instinctively seek to protect themselves. They seek to avoid pain, defend their position, justify their actions, and preserve their own interests. Such responses are deeply woven into human nature. Yet Christ presents a radically different path. Instead of beginning with self, He calls His followers to begin with surrender.

This principle appears repeatedly throughout Scripture. Believers are called to humility rather than self-exaltation. They are called to

forgiveness rather than retaliation. They are called to mercy rather than vengeance. They are called to consider the needs of others rather than becoming consumed with their own interests.

None of these commands are easy.

In fact, many become most difficult precisely when a person has been wounded.

It is one thing to speak about forgiveness when no offense has occurred. It is another thing to forgive when a real wound has been received.

It is one thing to speak about humility when no conflict exists. It is another thing to choose humility when pride feels justified.

It is one thing to speak about mercy in theory. It is another thing to extend mercy when disappointment has accumulated over many years.

For this reason, marriage often becomes one of the clearest places where the condition of the heart is revealed. The covenant brings two imperfect people into close relationship with one another.

Over time, weaknesses are exposed. Failures occur.

Disappointments accumulate. Wounds are experienced. In such circumstances, the teachings of Christ move from theory into practice.

The question is no longer whether self-denial sounds reasonable. The question becomes whether it is being lived.

This does not mean that sin should be ignored or that genuine problems within a marriage should be excused. Scripture never encourages people to pretend that evil does not exist. Rather, it requires each person to examine how they respond when evil, disappointment, or failure enters their life.

This brings us back to the issue before us.

If many of the roots we have examined are strengthened by self-preservation, self-justification, and self-protection, what happens when the teachings of Christ are applied to those roots?

What happens when self is no longer permitted to remain at the center?

The answer may help us understand why some marriages remain trapped within the same cycle for years while others begin moving toward restoration.

WHEN THE WOUND BEGINS TO RULE

At this point, it may be helpful to pause and consider how much influence a wound can have when it remains unaddressed for an extended period of time.

Most people assume that the greatest damage occurs when the original offense takes place. While the offense itself may be painful, the long-term effects are often determined by what follows afterward. A wound that heals properly does not continue exercising the same influence over a person's life. A wound that remains unresolved, however, may continue affecting thoughts, attitudes, decisions, and relationships for many years.

This reality can sometimes be observed within a troubled marriage.

A husband may find that present conversations are being influenced by disappointments that occurred years earlier. A wife may discover that current circumstances are being interpreted through the lens of previous injuries that have never fully healed. In some cases, husband and wife are no longer responding only to one another. They are also responding to accumulated memories, unresolved disappointments, and attitudes that have gradually developed over time.

As this process continues, the original wound may begin exercising an influence far greater than it was ever meant to have. It begins shaping expectations. It influences reactions. It affects trust. It affects communication. It affects the willingness to forgive. What began as a painful event slowly becomes a lens through which much of the marriage is viewed.

This influence is often difficult to recognize because it develops gradually. Rarely does a person decide that a past wound will govern future responses. More often, the influence grows little by little as disappointments accumulate and remain unresolved. Over

time, what was once an injury becomes a controlling factor in how the covenant is experienced.

This may help explain why some couples remain trapped in the same patterns for years. The original problem may have occurred long ago, yet the influence of that problem continues affecting the present. New disagreements become attached to old disappointments. New frustrations become connected to old injuries. Eventually husband and wife may find themselves carrying burdens that have become much heavier than the original offense itself.

The longer this process continues, the more difficult it becomes to separate present realities from past wounds. Current circumstances become interpreted through previous pain. Actions are measured against earlier disappointments. Motives are questioned because trust has already been weakened by past experiences.

It is here that another question begins to emerge. If the wound has gained this much influence, what is giving it that influence?

Why do some injuries eventually lose their power while others seem to retain it for years?

What allows a past offense to continue exercising authority over the present?

The answer may bring us even closer to the deepest root beneath the ruins.

WHAT GIVES THE WOUND ITS POWER?

As we have seen, not every wound produces the same result.

Some injuries heal with time. The memory may remain, but the wound gradually loses its influence. It no longer exercises the same control over thoughts, attitudes, or relationships that it once did. The event becomes part of a person's history without continuing to dominate the present.

Other wounds appear to follow a different path. Years may pass, yet the influence remains. The offense is still remembered with unusual clarity. The disappointment continues affecting trust. Old injuries continue shaping present responses. In some cases, the wound seems to retain a level of influence far beyond the event itself.

Why does this happen?

The answer cannot simply be the severity of the injury. Some people have experienced tremendous wounds and eventually found healing. Others continue struggling with disappointments that occurred many years earlier. Neither can the answer be found merely in the passage of time. Time certainly changes many things, yet it does not automatically resolve every issue of the heart.

This suggests that something more may be involved.

Perhaps the lasting influence of a wound is connected not only to what happened, but also to the place that wound continues to occupy within a person's life. An injury that belongs to the past can continue affecting the present when it remains closely connected to a person's thoughts, attitudes, expectations, and responses. Although the event itself may be over, its influence continues because it has never been fully separated from the way the present is experienced.

This process rarely occurs intentionally. Most people do not make a deliberate decision to strengthen resentment, preserve disappointment, or hold tightly to past injuries. More often, the influence develops gradually. The mind repeatedly returns to what happened. The heart repeatedly revisits the disappointment. Certain experiences become reference points through which new situations are interpreted and evaluated.

Over time, a husband may begin viewing present circumstances through the lens of previous disappointments. A wife may find that old injuries continue influencing how she understands present events. In some cases, husband and wife are responding not only to one another, but also to years of accumulated experiences that have never been fully resolved. The covenant becomes increasingly affected by past wounds because those wounds continue exerting influence within the present.

This observation brings us back to an important issue. If a wound continues affecting attitudes, responses, and conduct long after the original event has passed, it may be worth asking why that influence remains. What is sustaining it? What allows a past injury to continue exercising such authority over present circumstances?

The answer may help us better understand why some wounds gradually lose their power while others seem to retain it for years. It may also bring us closer to understanding the deepest root beneath the ruins.

WHAT ARE WE PROTECTING?

As we continue examining the influence that wounds can exert within a marriage, another question begins to emerge.

Why do some injuries gradually lose their influence while others seem to retain it for many years?

Although every situation is different, Scripture encourages us to look beyond the wound itself and examine the condition of the heart. In doing so, we may discover that the issue is not always found in the injury alone, but also in the things that have developed around that injury over time.

When people are wounded, they often begin protecting themselves from experiencing the same pain again. This response is understandable. No one enjoys disappointment. No one welcomes betrayal. No one desires rejection, neglect, or conflict. The desire to avoid future pain is a natural response to previous hurt.

The difficulty arises when protection slowly becomes the governing principle of the heart.

A person who has been disappointed may become increasingly reluctant to trust.

A person who has been wounded may become increasingly guarded.

A person who has been hurt repeatedly may become more concerned with avoiding future pain than with pursuing restoration.

None of these changes usually occur all at once. They often develop gradually over time and may appear entirely reasonable to the person experiencing them. In many cases, they are viewed not as problems but as necessary precautions.

Yet it is worth asking whether there comes a point at which protection begins producing its own difficulties.

Proverbs 28:13 (KJV) He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Can the walls that protect us from future disappointment also prevent reconciliation?

Can the barriers that shield us from further hurt also prevent healing?

Can the determination to avoid future pain make it more difficult to extend trust, mercy, forgiveness, or grace?

These questions become especially important within marriage because covenant relationships require a degree of openness and vulnerability that self-protection naturally resists. The more husband and wife withdraw behind protective walls, the more difficult it becomes to rebuild trust, restore intimacy, and strengthen unity.

This does not mean that wisdom should be abandoned or that genuine problems should be ignored. Scripture never encourages people to pretend that wounds do not exist. Rather, it encourages honest examination of the attitudes and responses that develop because of those wounds.

At this point, we may be approaching an important realization. Many of the roots we have examined seem connected to a common desire. Whether expressed through bitterness, resentment, distrust, pride, unforgiveness, or self-righteousness, there often appears to be a determination to preserve, protect, defend, or justify something.

The question is what that something is.

Until that question is answered, the deepest root beneath the ruins may remain hidden.

WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF HEALING?

As we have worked through this study, one observation has continued appearing. The original wound, while often significant, does not always seem to be the primary reason a marriage remains broken. In many cases, the greater difficulty appears to be found in what developed afterward.

This may help explain why two couples can experience similar disappointments and yet arrive at very different outcomes. Both may experience conflict. Both may endure seasons of hurt. Both may suffer broken trust, unmet expectations, or painful failures within the covenant. Yet one couple gradually moves toward healing while another remains trapped within the same cycle for years.

What accounts for the difference?

The answer is not always easy to identify because it is often found beneath the visible circumstances. The issue may not be the existence of the wound itself but the relationship that husband and wife continue to have with that wound.

Some people gradually release the offense and begin moving forward. Others continue carrying it. Some learn to separate the past from the present. Others remain deeply influenced by events that occurred many years earlier. Some become increasingly willing to extend mercy, patience, and forgiveness. Others become increasingly guarded, defensive, and resistant.

This does not happen because one person's wounds were necessarily smaller than another's. Rather, it often reflects something taking place within the heart.

Throughout Scripture, healing and restoration are frequently connected to humility. *James 4:6 (KJV) But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.* Pride, on the other hand, often becomes a barrier to both. A

humble heart remains teachable. It remains willing to examine itself. It remains willing to acknowledge wrong, receive correction, and pursue reconciliation. Pride tends to move in a different direction. It becomes increasingly concerned with self-preservation, self-justification, and self-defense.

This may be why some wounds continue exercising influence for so many years. The injury itself becomes closely connected to a person's sense of identity, their view of the relationship, or their understanding of what is owed to them. As a result, releasing the wound begins to feel like surrendering something important. Letting go feels dangerous. Forgiveness feels costly. Vulnerability feels risky.

Yet the longer these attitudes remain, the more difficult restoration often becomes.

A husband may become convinced that he cannot risk being hurt again.

A wife may become convinced that she cannot risk trusting again. Both may believe they are protecting themselves, while neither realizes that the same walls protecting them from future disappointment may also be preventing future healing.

This observation brings us back to the teachings of Christ. Again and again, He directed His followers away from self-preservation and toward surrender. He taught humility rather than self-exaltation. He taught forgiveness rather than the keeping of debts. He taught mercy rather than retaliation. He taught that the path of discipleship often requires laying down things that human nature desperately wants to hold onto.

Perhaps this is why some marriages remain trapped within the ruins while others begin moving toward restoration. The issue may not always be found in the size of the wound. It may be found in the willingness or unwillingness to surrender the things that have grown around that wound.

This does not immediately solve the problem before us. It does, however, bring us much closer to identifying the deepest root beneath the ruins.

THE QUESTION EVERY HUSBAND AND WIFE MUST ANSWER

As we come to the end of this examination, it may be helpful to return to the question that has quietly followed us throughout this study.

What is truly destroying the marriage?

At the beginning of our study, many possible answers were considered. Communication problems, financial pressures, conflict, emotional distance, broken trust, disappointment, neglect, disrespect, and countless other difficulties can certainly affect the condition of a covenant. None of these issues should be dismissed lightly.

Yet as we have continued our examination, another possibility has emerged.

The visible ruins may not always be the deepest problem.

The wound itself may not always be the deepest problem.

Even the roots that grew from the wound may not be the deepest problem.

Again and again, our attention has been drawn toward the condition of the heart and the place that certain attitudes, responses, and desires have come to occupy within it.

For this reason, perhaps the most important question facing husband and wife is not what happened to them.

Perhaps the more important question is what they have done with what happened to them.

Have the wounds produced humility or pride?

Have the disappointments produced wisdom or resentment?

Have the failures within the covenant produced mercy or bitterness?

Have the injuries driven husband and wife closer to God, or further into self-protection and self-preservation?

These questions are not always comfortable because they require honest self-examination. It is often easier to identify the failures of another person than it is to examine our own responses before God. Yet throughout Scripture, self-examination remains a necessary part of spiritual growth.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (KJV) Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves...

This is especially true within marriage.

Every covenant will experience difficulties. Every husband and wife will eventually disappoint one another. Every marriage will face seasons that test patience, forgiveness, humility, mercy, and love. The question is not whether those moments will come. The question is what will be allowed to grow from them.

For some couples reading this study, the damage may still be relatively small. The cracks have appeared, but the structure remains standing. For others, the condition of the marriage may feel far more serious. Some may be living with deep division. Some may be separated. Some may be considering divorce. Others may wonder whether the covenant has already suffered more damage than can ever be repaired.

Whatever the circumstance may be, the question remains the same.

What lies beneath the ruins?

Until that question is answered honestly, every attempt at restoration will remain incomplete. Visible problems may be addressed. New agreements may be reached. Temporary

improvements may occur. Yet if the underlying issues remain untouched, the same difficulties often return in different forms.

This is why the examination cannot end with the behavior of another person.

It must eventually reach the heart.

Before asking what a husband must change, each wife must examine herself.

Before asking what a wife must change, each husband must examine himself.

Before asking how the covenant can be restored, both must be willing to ask what may be standing in the way of that restoration.

The purpose of this study has not been to provide all the answers. Its purpose has been to help identify the problem. For before a root can be removed, it must first be exposed. Before healing can begin, the source of the disease must be understood. Before restoration can take place, husband and wife must be willing to see clearly what has been developing beneath the ruins.

Only then can the work of restoration truly begin.

CONTINUE THE EXAMINATION

If this study has challenged you, resist the temptation to close the booklet and immediately turn your attention elsewhere.

The purpose of this study was not to provide every answer concerning marriage. Its purpose was to help identify what may be taking place beneath the surface. Visible problems are often easy to recognize. Hidden roots are not.

As you reflect upon what you have read, take time to honestly examine your own heart before God.

Have past wounds continued to influence your attitudes, responses, and conduct?

Have disappointments developed into bitterness, resentment, distrust, or unforgiveness?

Have old injuries been allowed to shape the way you view your spouse, your covenant, or your future?

Have efforts to protect yourself from further pain gradually become barriers to healing and restoration?

These questions are not always easy to answer. Yet throughout Scripture, genuine healing begins with truth. Before a root can be removed, it must first be exposed.

For some readers, this examination may reveal problems that are still small and can be addressed before greater damage occurs. For others, it may expose roots that have been developing quietly for many years. Some may even find themselves examining a marriage that appears to be standing on the edge of collapse.

Whatever your circumstances may be, remember that identifying the root is not the end of the process.

It is the beginning.

The next step is not merely to recognize what has been growing
beneath the ruins.

The next step is learning how those roots are removed.

In our next study, *Uprooting What Destroyed the Covenant*, we
will examine the biblical path toward repentance, forgiveness,
humility, healing, and the removal of the very things that have
been quietly weakening the covenant.

CONTINUE GROWING

Additional Bible studies examining marriage, family, discipleship,
obedience, and Christian living are available at:

<https://zionsroar.org/biblical-studies>

NEED HELP?

If you would like to study these subjects further, have questions
about this material, or would like biblical fellowship and
encouragement, we invite you to contact us.

We would be honored to open the Scriptures with you and
examine these subjects together.

Restoration does not begin when we understand everything.

It begins when we become willing to submit ourselves to the truth
God reveals.