

Unconflicting Marriages and Relationships

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Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-3 (CEV)

¹ As a prisoner of the Lord, I beg you to live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own.

² Always be humble and gentle. Patiently put up with each other and love each other.

³ Try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace.”

Introduction

“Wendy had just spent an hour looking for her credit card. Again. Her parents were over to look after the children while she and Paul were to go out to celebrate their wedding anniversary. They are now running late. She was also extremely hurt by Paul because Paul, in front of their two children (10 and 4) and her parents, lost his temper with her, because she lost her credit card. Wendy left the room in tears and wondered if she pushed herself even harder in the gym, would Paul think differently about her.¹”

Obviously, the best way to manage conflict is not to have any conflict in the first place.

Yet, we do experience varying degrees of conflict in our marriages and relationships. And there is no shortage of issues that cause the conflict. What does this mean? It means that unless couples can manage issues arising, God cannot be fully glorified in their marriage or relationships, in general.

Conflict management is more about right standing with God as a couple than it is about being in right standing with each other. 2 weeks ago, I made the bold claim that there is only 1 thing that can go wrong in a marriage, and that is when the couple or one of them take their eyes off of Jesus, who is at the centre of their marriage or relationship. What follows when eyes are taken off of Jesus, are merely symptoms.

Conflict management gives you 2 choices, do you want to be reconciled or do you want to be right? The first is constructive and the second destructive. Choose with wisdom!

¹ From FaithCoach's course on After Divorce Care.

Body

If we have to resolve conflict, we can either enter into power struggles, sabotage, avoidance and manipulation or we can enter into cooperating, compromising and accommodating. One approach is self-centred, the other God-centred.

Here is what the Bible has to say:

Live in a way that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own

Let's start as the basics; you did not choose God. He chose you. "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4).

Therefore, to live in an unworthy manner raises all sorts of questions about your relationship with God, let alone with others. God has chosen you to live this life in a very specific manner, a manner which speaks to your very mode of existence:

- Holy.
- Blameless.

You cannot "holy" yourself and being with sin, you are incapable of being blameless. At his point, you should realize that to live a worthy life, you need Jesus. If Jesus is the lens through which you view your wife/husband and other relationships, then you should be seeing people as God sees them. If you don't ... well the problem is certainly not with God.

If you want to see others as God sees them, then you need to place Jesus at the centre of your marriage and relationships.

Be humble and gentle

The opposite of humility is pride. Humility is that place of less of me and more of God. Humility is that place where God lifts you and you find favour with God (1 Peter 5:5-6). Peter actually sets humility as the pre-requirement to casting anxiety/worries on God. What exactly can we cast on God? Everything, including relationships that are in trouble.

Peter says more in verse 7, he says that God cares for you. You matter to God; your marriage and other relationships matter to God. God is intimately involved in all your life, in your marriage and in your relationships.

Now gentleness is a fruit of Spirit, as we know. Gentleness, in context, is moral excellence and integrity in that gentleness is useful, better, easy, good gracious and kind.

When we agree to be humble and gentle, we also agree to lay down pride, revenge and harshness (may we include aggression)?

Patiently put up with each other and love each other

My mom has been patiently putting up with me for over 50 years. How ... why? It's up to what you understand about "putting up" with someone. As you will soon realize, "putting up with" is much more than merely tolerating.

When you put up with someone, you forbear them, meaning that there is firstly a time component (patience) and secondly the ability to no matter what life brings. It is the love of God working in our hearts and then expressed.

Putting up with each other means that you – husband/wife have a basic choice here:

1. Magnify each other's imperfections and neutralize the good that you can do or
2. Smoothly move on, sympathizing with one another and supporting one another in the love of God.

Love, as we said last week, is unconditional when God is involved. The moment your love has any T&Cs then it is conditional love and it will fall short of what is needed. You put up with each other because God's love makes it possible: conditional love is where imperfections are magnified and unconditional love is where "putting up with" flourishes.

Let God's Spirit keep your hearts united ... Do this by living at peace

God's Spirit does the uniting work, not you. Being united is a state of peace. But with who?

John 16:33, one of my "go-to" Scriptures says, *"I have told you this, so that you might have peace in your hearts because of me. While you are in the world, you will have to suffer. But cheer up! I have defeated the world."* Peace because of Jesus ... let that sink in for a while.

True peace is in Jesus and the Holy Spirit binds us together in Him. We are His children, we are one family and our state of existence is peaceful and God centred. Unitedness and peace is the privilege of those in Jesus. As people of the Lord, we have the privilege of peace in the midst of suffering, troubles, and pain.

Living in unitedness and peace is a way worthy of God's people. One body, one Spirit of God, one hope, one Lord Jesus, one faith, one baptism and one God.

A Question of Style

So there is some conflict that needs to be resolved to the glory of God. What's next? It is a question of style.

On the one hand, we have a concern for self, and on the other hand, a concern for others. Each of these concerns rates from low to high. Our possibilities are:

1. A high concern for others with a low concern for self leads to accommodating the other.
2. A low concern for others with a low concern for self leads to avoidance.
3. A low concern for others with a high concern for self leads to competitiveness.
4. A high concern for others with a high concern for self leads to collaboration.
5. The middle ground is -compromise.

With today's message in mind, which styles are best for resolving conflict? Only those where the concern for others is high, which includes a compromise. This is cooperativeness (desirable) and at the other end of the scale is assertiveness (can lead to conflict on conflict).

Cooperativeness means that our focus is on Jesus and everyone important to Jesus. In this approach, we find unity and peace wherein God is glorified.

Conclusion

Conflict is a reality of relationships and the absence of conflict does not necessarily make a good marriage. It can also mean that apathy has set in. The same can be said when a high rate of conflict is experienced within the relationship. On the other hand, it can indicate an independent as opposed to a cooperative mindset.

It has been said that conflict is experienced when a need is not met. God meets all your relationship needs, as long as He is at the centre of that relationship. In this way, God is glorified through the relationship and we can live out our marriages and other relationships in a manner that is worthy of the people God has chosen to be his own.

So be humble and gentle. Do patiently put up with each other and love each other. Do try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace. Amen.