

HOME IMPROVEMENT



**Enriching Values &
Strengthening Relationships**

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Feb 1-4
Sunday - Wednesday
Kingsport, TN

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HOW TO GIVE AND RECEIVE CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION

- A. "First behold the beam in *your* eye..." Matt 7:1-5
- B. However, one is not to deal with oneself alone.
 - 1. "Faithful are the *wounds* of a friend." Prov 27:6
 - 2. "Admonish one another." Rom 15:14
 - 3. "Silence may be golden but sometimes it is just plain yellow!"
 - 4. The old adage, "If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all," is not true. Sometimes it takes courage to warn or to instruct a person so s/he is built up spiritually. It may be what is sorely needed.

I. BIBLICAL INSTRUCTIONS

- A. Prov 12:1 "He that *hates reproof is stupid!*"
- B. Prov 12:15 "He that hearketh unto counsel is wise."
- C. Prov 3:11 "Don't *refuse criticism.*"
- D. Prov 13:18 "If you refuse criticism, you will end in *disgrace.*"
- E. Prov 25:12 "He wears a badge of honor who *accepts reproof.*"
- F. Eph 4:15 "Speak the *truth in love.*"

ALL OF US ARE IMPERFECT & NEED HELP!
THIS IS TRUE OF EVERY RELATIONSHIP.
We all have room to grow!

- 1. Husbands & wives, parents & children, etc. need help from one another. We tend to shun it, but we need it!
- 2. Have you ever tried to proofread your own work?
- 3. We all need help from others who periodically shed light on our blind spots.
Prov 16:2 Self-deception is the worst kind.

The problem is not criticism--but destructive criticism. Too often we don't know how to do it right so we avoid it all together.

WE MUST BUILD UP & NOT TEAR DOWN!

II. HOW TO GIVE CRITICISM *CONSTRUCTIVELY*

A. Choose your setting carefully -- timing is everything!

1. Do so after a meal and not when you're hungry.
Ex. Esther gave two banquets *before* she approached the king.
Afterwards, she got what she desired.
2. Criticize in **private** -- praise in **public**!
3. Consider the *feelings* of the other person.
 - a) How do you find out when it is okay?
 - b) *Ask!* "Honey, do you mind me sharing a constructive suggestion with you tonight?" S/he will either say "yes" or "no." If "no", usually curiosity will cause your spouse to ask about it later. Then s/he will be mentally prepared and less defensive. Doesn't that make sense?
4. Most people want to be helped and desire honesty in the relationship if they are just approached in the right way.
5. However, "A man convinced of his will is of the same opinion still!"

DON'T SHARE UNTIL YOU ARE SURE THE OTHER PARTY IS *EMOTIONALLY* READY ...

B. Don't give an overdose!

1. One common failure is to pour it on! ("...And another thing, and another thing, etc.")
2. Hagar the Horrible gets permission and then says, "Better sit down and get comfortable."
3. Most don't realize how critical they have become...*LISTEN* to yourself. (Prov 17:9)

**WARNING:
OVERDOSING KILLS THE MOTIVATION TO CHANGE!**

**SUGGESTION:
ONLY ONE CRITICISM A WEEK!!!
(That ought to be enough --- that's 52 a year!)**

4. Challenge: Make it easy! **Ask for it** periodically.

C. Couple criticism with compliments

1. Notice the ratio: 3 compliments to 1 criticism (John's example in Rev 2:1-4)
2. "The bitter pill of criticism can be swallowed much easier if first sugar-coated with the medicine of sincere praise."

3. Mary Poppins says: "Just a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down!"

III. HOW TO RECEIVE CRITICISM *CONSTRUCTIVELY*

- A. Recognize the hand of GOD! Rom 8:28 (GOD wants to use this for my good.)
- B. Let your first words be "Thank you!" I Thess 5:18 "In everything give thanks."
Three reasons:
 1. He said it to your face -- not behind your back.
 2. If it is true, you need to change and now you can grow.
 3. If it is false, it gives you opportunity to correct the misunderstanding.
- C. Always ask:
 1. Then **take action** if possible. You can't do what everyone says!
Ex. My daughter wanted me to triple her allowance--not a good idea.
 2. Work with the reasonable requests for small things as much as possible.
- D. Never give the same criticism two weeks in a row. Give the other party at least a month before you bring up the same thing again.

What can I learn from criticism?

Not all are valid. But we can still learn something from all kinds of criticism.

IV. WHAT ABOUT THE THINGS THAT WON'T CHANGE?

- A. "Love covers a multitude of sins." I Peter 4:8

LOVE ACCEPTS MANY IMPERFECTIONS!

Some things you will need to accept...

1. Otherwise, anger turns inward and becomes *bitterness and depression*.
2. Say the **Serenity Prayer!**

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference!"

3. "It is to His glory to pass over a transgression and seek love." Prov 18:11

THE CONCLUSION

Don't mind criticism...
If it is not true, disregard it.
If it is unfair, keep from irritation.
If it is ignorant, smile.
If it is justified, learn from it!

TAKE THE "CRITICISM PLEDGE" & TRY A UNIQUE FAST

We live in a negative world! We are all bombarded with criticism constantly. Why not allow your home to be a refuge from criticism? Think of your mate as a haven, a peaceful retreat, the ever-quiet eye of the hurricane.

Research has found that the significant decreasing of criticism and negative comments from our family relationships is even more important than learning to express love positively. Small wonder Paul stresses we are to dwell on the positive! "Whatsoever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, dwell on these things" Phil 4:8. One of the reasons this is so important is that it takes a great many positive strokes to make up for even one critical comment. So, keep criticisms to a minimum and express them only if you feel it is really necessary. "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath" Jas 1:19.

Try promising your mate you will never say a critical word about him or her, make him\her the brunt of jokes, nor in any way speak unkindly of the other or betray your relationship, and ask your partner to do the same!

Think about it... What confidence it gives a woman to know that when other men are making fun of their wives or complaining about their weaknesses like their cooking, homemaking, lovemaking, shortcomings, and faults, her name is safe. And likewise, when women get together and begin to belittle their husbands, what security it gives a man to know that his name will not be mentioned. Oh, it is not because there are no faults; faults are self-evident. It isn't because it wouldn't be justified. Speaking no ill of each other is simply...

BECAUSE OF YOUR LOYALTY TO ONE ANOTHER!

HOW DOES ONE OVERCOME BEING A CRITICAL PERSON?
TAKE A 24-HOUR CRITICISM FAST!

Start by stopping! For a period of 24 hours, refrain from criticizing yourself, the government, the food, your boss and/or co-workers, your spouse, your surroundings --- come to a complete halt for twenty-four hours!! Watch out for back-seat driving and comments on other drivers. Phone calls are dangerous. Especially watch out when you are hungry or under any kind of time pressure! You cannot criticize anyone for any reason unless human life is in danger. Another exception would be if you hear or see

another person who has agreed to take the fast but is criticizing without realizing it. You may, in this case, point out kindly to him/her that s/he has done so and needs to start over, without being critical yourself for having pointed it out!

This is not as easy as it sounds. The majority of people do not succeed in their first attempt. Do not be discouraged. If you find yourself being critical, make a note of the time and start your "fast" over again until you have gone for 24 hours (including the time you are asleep) without being critical at all!

BE CAREFUL NOT TO COMMIT WHAT I CALL, "Criticism of the Heart." If a critical thought enters your mind and you get rid of the thought in a moment, then it does not count and you do not have to start your 24 hours over. If, on the other hand, you let that critical thought stay in your mind and you develop it into a full production with quadraphonic sound and vista vision, then you must start over again. Don't be too hard on yourself if you don't succeed in this assignment right away. This is a difficult assignment!

WHY SHOULD YOU TRY?

These are the positive objectives that I hope you will experience while doing this:

1. It will increase your awareness of the critical nature of our society.
2. It will help you to become aware of your own compulsion to criticize.
3. It will enable you to experience the power of self-mastery.

The answer to the question "Why should I try to stop criticizing?" is simply... "So that you can lay a foundation for love and acceptance in your home instead of rejection."

Take the pledge of verbal loyalty to the relationship to demonstrate your commitment to it! As a token of your willingness, stop criticizing. Commitment and willingness are two keys to loving, lasting, emotionally-close marriages.

I challenge newlyweds and couples who desire to enrich their marriages and to experience emotional 'remarriage' to take the following pledge:

"I promise, as your mate, that I will never speak ill of you to friend, family, or stranger. I will not embarrass or belittle you in front of others, nor will I be critical of you in your absence. I will not discuss our personal problems with anyone without your permission. This is my pledge to you."

NOW LIVE IT!!!!

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

Introduction

- A. "Holy Head-lock" or "Holy Wed-lock"? (Is love the wine of life and marriage the hangover?)
- B. A "marriage made in heaven" (not perfect, but highly satisfactory) IS possible!
 - 1. "It takes two to tango---three to marry"
 - 2. "What God joins together..." Matt 19:6
 - 3. God invented marriage. It's the only part of Paradise left!
- C. KEY: Return to the beginning (source, blueprint)
- D. The Garden of Eden provides 4 MUSTS (pillars) for a successful marriage
 - 1. When building, concentrate on YOURSELF, not your spouse!
 - 2. "Marriage is not so much finding the right person as being the right person."

The 4 PILLARS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE ---

#1 SEVERANCE

- a. "Leave & cleave" --- breaking the parent/child bond is ESSENTIAL!
- b. Weddings are simultaneously sad and beautiful --- there is a loss!
- c. When there is no severance, there is trouble.
 - 1. Adam & Eve represent the perfect family (no problems)
 - 2. Adam had no mother-in-law! (no parent/child conflicts)
- d. If one can't leave, one shouldn't marry!
Illus.: The song "Billy Boy" shows that if the girl is "a young thing and cannot leave her mother,"...it's a good reason to not take her for a wife.
- e. "A man SHALL leave..." is strongly stated. It's not might or may.

#2 PERMANENCE

- a. Cleave means "to cling to, to grab or hold with firmness"
- b. It's not drifting from the dock and tying up somewhere else!
- c. IT IS FOR LIFE! (Not masking tape, but super glue!)
- d. KEY: Never consider divorce an option!
- e. "What God has joined together..." Matt 19:6
 - 1. Don't prematurely sever marriage by divorce, but only by death.
 - 2. Embalming & divorce: 2 things not to be done before their time!
- f. We must learn to live with and just accept some things like our bodies, the day of our death, and the people we have chosen to marry.
- g. Choose your love and love your choice!

#3 UNITY

- a. "Shall become one..." It's a PROCESS designed perfectly by God for us.
- b. "Marriage is two becoming one and the whole time you are trying to figure out which one you are becoming!"
- c. This is a growth process you work toward.
 - 1. It's not just liking the same things (though that helps)!
 - 2. It's more than just uniformity.
- d. There must be surrender, or it becomes uniformity, not unity!
Illus.—Picture two cats with tails tied together thrown over a fence... is this union or unity???
- e. Unity involves the willingness to blend wills, YOURS with your MATE's!
 - 1. KEY: Look for mutual goals.
 - 2. "Love is not so much looking into each other's eyes, but looking in the same direction!"
 - 3. Only then will you become one!

THE GOAL: To grow closer to each other by molding each one's will to God's!

#4 INTIMACY

- a. They were "both naked and not ashamed."
 - 1. This is literal, but broader than physical.
 - 2. It means no emotional barriers --- no covering up.
 - 3. Be emotionally naked and open before each other...not afraid!
- b. It's tragic when one can't share his/her life with the other.
 - 1. KEY: Meaningful self-disclosure!
 - 2. This requires some T.V. --- Transparent Vulnerability!
- c. Being totally open with each other's faults, knowing you are still loved anyway, and trusting this information will not be misused, then you will truly discover a MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN!

CONCLUSION:

THESE ARE GOD'S PRINCIPLES --- THEY WILL WORK TO BLESS US
IF WE WILL WORK TO USE THEM!!!

“Unity”

Man satisfies the woman;
Woman satisfies the man;
GOD blesses the union.

Man plants the seed;
Woman bears the child;
GOD gives the spirit.

Man sets the discipline standards;
Woman sets the love standards;
GOD balance discipline with love.

Man is the bread winner;
Woman is the bread warmer;
GOD is the bread provider.

Man is woman's hero;
Woman is man's cheerleader;
GOD is the coach.

Man leads as the woman's head;
Woman follows as the man's body;
GOD makes them become one flesh.

Man presents a picture of Christ;
Woman presents a picture of the church;
GOD makes them joint-heirs.

THE MARRIAGE CREED

- COMFORT EACH OTHER...Provide a refuge and sanctuary for each other from the chill winds of the world. Your marriage is a hearth, from whence comes the peace, harmony, and warmth of soul and spirit.
- CARESS AS YOU WOULD BE CARESSED...Warm your loved one's body with your healing touch. Remember that as babies can die with lack of touching, so marriages can wither from lack of closeness.
- BE A FRIEND AND PARTNER...Friendship can be a peaceful island, separate and apart, in a world of turmoil and strife. Reflect upon the tranquility of the many future years you can share with a true friend and beware of becoming battling enemies under the same roof.
- BE OPEN WITH ONE ANOTHER...Bind not yourselves in the secretness that causes suspicion and doubt. Trust and reveal yourselves to each other, even as the budding rose opens to reveal its fragrance and beauty. REALLY LISTEN...and hear not only words, but also the non-language of tone, mood, and expression. Learn to listen in order to understand rather than listening to argue.
- RESPECT EACH OTHER'S RIGHTS...Remember that each is a person of flesh and blood, entitled to his or her own choices and mistakes. Each owns himself and has the right to equality.
- ALLOW FOR INDIVIDUALITY...Seek not to create for each other a new mold that can only fit with much discomfort and pain. Accept the other as he or she is, just as you would have yourself accepted.
- GIVE MUTUAL APPROVAL...Remember, criticism divides while compliments encourage confidence in the other. Hasten not to point out the other's mistakes, for each will soon discover his own.
- CHERISH YOUR UNION...Let no one come between your togetherness...not child, not friend, not worldly goods. Yet maintain enough separateness to allow each other his or her own uniqueness.
- LOVE ONE ANOTHER...Love is your river of life---your eternal source of re-creating yourselves. Above all else---love one another.

SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DIVORCE

Symptoms of spiritual divorce are indicators that a separation is developing and needs to be confronted through dialogue. They are “signs” and are present at some time in every marriage. Take about 20 minutes apiece for each to privately do this exercise then exchange your answers and discuss together. Don’t allow fear to prevent you from being open with each other.

Instructions:

- Read through all the symptoms. Which symptoms are currently present in your marriage? Place a check mark next to each one.
 - Re-read those that are checked. Select 2 or 3 you feel most strongly about right now.
 - Write and describe your feelings about those 2 or 3. If time allows, continue on to the others checked.
2. Prolonged moods of sadness in our marriage and in the family
 3. Feelings of disillusionment, boredom, and emptiness
 4. Dissatisfaction
 5. Indifference to each other’s problems
 6. Occasions of coldness in our relationship
 7. Avoiding or refusing sexual relationship
 8. No interest in things of the other – lack of sensitivity
 9. Lack of kindness, tenderness, and small courtesies
 10. Failure to take time to think deeply
 11. Feelings of insecurity and mutual distrust
 12. More confidence in a third person other than with each other
 13. Lack of dialogue and intimate communication
 14. Most communication mechanical, routine, and surface
 15. Feelings of being alone and not understood
 16. Frequent bad humor and tension
 17. Feeling used
 18. Frequent quarrels: in private, or in front of children or others
 19. Ridicule of each other
 20. Superficial life and continuous escapes, together or alone, such as liquor, drugs, TV, compulsive socializing
 21. Attitude of selfishness
 22. Insults, rude words, and sarcasm
 23. Avoidance of situations that deeply need attention
 24. Personal relationship with God causing conflict
 25. Lack of appreciation
 26. Lack or loss of a sense of wonder
 27. Lack of faith in love and marriage
 28. Insensitive teasing
 29. Nagging

TEN RULES FOR A GOOD CLEAN FIGHT

Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

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Introduction

- A. Two ideas to remember about hostility:
1. It is natural. Motion (growth) requires some friction.
 - a. Marriages are made in heaven, but so are *thunder and lightening storms!*
 - b. Marriage is similar to the merging of two great rivers
 - 1) Merging into ONE two different lives, backgrounds, habits, etc.
 - 2) Trying to share the same time, space & resources
 - 3) What happens when rivers merge together – RAPIDS! WHITE WATER.
 - 4) It is only natural that the blending of lives together will produce some friction, disagreements and conflicts.
 2. Since it is inevitable, you must agree to settle differences “agreeably.” **It is the #1 interpersonal skill necessary for long-term marital stability, so make sure you master it!**
- B. Handled properly conflict can be a good thing. Learn to view “*fight*s” not as tragedies, but opportunities!
1. Venting personal frustrations through lips which have learned how to do so can serve a wonderful purpose.
 2. Skill and self-control can turn potentially destructive squabbles into “*fair fights*” which solve problems and yield positive results!
 3. Remember: The secret to a good marriage is not finding the right person, but *learning to fight well with the person you have found!*

Rule #1—BE DRIVEN BY LOVE!

- A. This is the **one principle** from which all the others spring (we’re laying the foundation). Husbands and wives are to love each other, **Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:4**.
1. That means more than just having warm feelings of affection for each other. It means I always want to act in their best interest – always seeking their good and never doing anything to hurt them.
 2. It’s not just an emotion; love is a decision to behave in a certain way. When Paul defined love, he described it as ***a way of behaving***, I Cor. 13:4ff.
 3. If we want to manage conflict well, then we need to be sure that our actions are **always driven by love**, I must never do anything thing to hurt. I should always be acting in the best interest of my spouse.
 - a. Love needs to be the atmosphere that fills our homes and pulses through our marriage conflicts.
 - b. Before we speak or act, we need to ask, “Am I acting with love?”
 - c. Folks, that’s not just a good idea, that’s what God demands.

- B. Now, the other principles spring from this one. If you want to act with love, then before you can address a conflict, you first need to...

Rule #2 -- DO YOUR THING TO COOL OFF! (Eph 4:26; Prov 29:8, 30:33, 17:27)

- A. Never be ashamed of anger--it is natural, not sinful. The only thing you need to regret is handling it badly. Prov 29:22 "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."
- B. Since you are literally in a state of **intoxication** when your "*fuse is lit*," reduce the emotional state before a discussion begins.
1. "*There is more hope for a fool than a man of quick temper.*" Prov 29:20
 2. "*...and a wrathful man stirreth up contention.*" Prov 15:18
 3. **IF YOU ARGUE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY, YOU'RE APT TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE!**
- C. If we are driven by love, we will do whatever it takes to cool off **FIRST!**
1. Engage in some physical activity
 2. Go for a walk
 3. Take a hot bath
 4. Pray alone--it calms the spirit so you can see the situation more clearly.
- D. The key here is this: **Rule our passions, rather than allowing our passions to rule us!**
1. Prov 16:32 "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, then he who captures a city."
 2. **No one likes living with a volcano** – we must cool off and get anger under control.
- D. Afterwards, you may just decide to forget the whole thing! (Prov 17:9, 19:11)
If not, proceed to Rule #3!

Rule #3--ARGUE WITH THE RIGHT PERSON (Prov 3:30, 25:9)

- A. Remember to express frustration/anger toward the person you are really angry with and **not some innocent party**.
1. Be honest. Husbands, how many times are you angry and frustrated at something at work, and the poor wife suddenly can't do anything right?
 2. Similarly, wives can be frustrated after dealing with the kids all day and consequently are ready for war as soon as their husbands come in the door?
 3. We all do it – and it is grossly unfair!
Prov 3:30 "Do not accuse a man for no reason – when he has done you no harm!"
- B. Beating up on innocent third parties is called "*dumping*."
1. **Dumping is cruel**, it allows you to **escape** the real person or issue, and **resolves nothing**. It only makes matters worse!
 2. So, have the courage to **make sure** you are bringing your complaint to the right person.

Rule #4--ARGUE ABOUT THE RIGHT THING (Prov 15:7, 28)

- A. Seems obvious too, but how many marriage conflicts are really about an **unspoken**

agenda? Many arguments are fought about the **wrong subjects**.

1. Ex. Husband criticizes his wife's housekeeping when the real complaint is a lack of intimacy in the relationship!
2. Ex. Wife criticizes her husband's tardiness when the real issue is she is feeling neglected?
3. We must be **in touch with our feelings** and ask, "*Am I really angry because of this or is it something else?*"
4. Sometimes our arguments solve nothing because we are not talking about the right thing.
5. A good indication of a hidden agenda is when **OUR ANGER IS OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE OFFENSE**.

B. The issue here is one of Honesty, Eph 4:25.

1. We must learn to be upfront about our frustrations and stop working with a hidden agenda.
2. Not only is it dishonest and unfair, but arguing about the wrong thing does nothing to solve the problem!
3. In 8:32 Jesus said: "*The truth will set you FREE.*" You will not have an *authentic* successful marriage unless you are honest.

Rule #5--ARGUE AT THE RIGHT TIME (Ecc 3:1-11; Prov 25:8)

A. Both must agree the time is right before beginning. Something as simple as timing can make a big difference in how we resolve our marriage conflicts.

B. Here are some times not to argue:

1. **In front of company.** To do so is *degrading*. *Violates trust*.
2. **When there is not enough time to finish.** Have you ever found yourself in the middle of big argument right before company arrives or it is time to go to services?
3. **When either party is hungry or tired**
4. **Just as one or both spouses comes home from work**
 - a. 80% of marital fights occur between 5-6 pm
 - b. Instead of celebrating being together, we dump on each other. That is a bad time.
 - c. Good rule of thumb: Do not discuss problems until after dinner.

Rule #6--DON'T BE HISTORICAL (Eph 4:26)

A. Man complains, "My wife always gets historical." Amused, his friend replied, "I think you mean hysterical." "No, I mean historical," he said. When we argue she reminds me of everything I've ever done wrong."

1. Why do we drag up the past? Often we are losing an argument so past blunders are brought up in order to gain some advantage.
2. Example: "I might be wrong now, but you are just as guilty." This moves us in the wrong direction!

B. Be committed to not bring up past fights.

1. "*He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends.*" Prov 17:9
2. Bringing up items that you thought were resolved **breeds mistrust** and a **lack of confidence** in the relationship.

- C. The real issue is one of **FORGIVENESS**. Eph 4:31-32
1. Once an argument is resolved, it is to be **buried and never resurrected**. Don't bury the hatchet with the handle left sticking out of the ground.
 2. Before ending an argument, make sure it is closed for both parties.
 - a. If it's not, don't drop it until it is resolved.
 - b. But when it is finished, then **both must agree is over**. Period.
 3. Paul said that in true love, I Cor 13:5 one does not "*Take into account a wrong suffered.*" Love means we stop keeping the books.

Rule #7 – DON'T RAISE YOUR VOICE.

- A. That is tough if increasing the decibel level is how you grew up! To some, a fight isn't a fight without some yelling!
1. Truth is, loudness does not make things better; and it does not communicate love. In fact, it's often when we start getting louder that hurtful things come out of our mouth.
 2. Yelling at someone is *disrespectful and degrading*. It certainly is not the golden rule.
 3. Harsh, loud words are **not consistent with the love that should drive our actions**. Paul said that love leads us to be "kind," (I Cor 13.4).
- B. **Listen to Solomon:** Prov 15:1, "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*"
1. Here is the key: "Lower your voice one octave, rather than raising it two."
 2. Make a point as the heat goes up in a discussion, to take the volume down.

Rule #8--AVOID NAME CALLING (Prov 14:22, 27:4)

- A. There is no excuse for hurling insults or profane names at loved ones.
1. Abusing intimacy and resorting to "*knife twisting*" are especially harmful.
 2. Thoughtless names (labels) puncture deeply and are remembered for years.
- B. Three reasons why personal verbal assaults are so destructive:
1. They throw an argument off-track and does not lead to a resolution.
 2. They focus attention on the mate, not on solving the problem.
 3. They hurt the relationship and **ruin mutual respect**.

- C. Three suggestions:
 1. Tackle the problem, not the person.
 2. Replace "**you**" statements with "**I**" statements. (Instead of "*You lazy bum!*" say, "*I feel you're not working as hard as you could.*")
 3. Be determined to only use words that edify! Eph 4:29 "Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so it will give grace to those who hear."
- D. Insults, sarcasm, filthy and profane names are sometimes used with our spouse that we would never even consider using with anyone else!
 1. We should treat our families the best, not the worst!
 2. I Cor 13 tells us love is patient, kind, does not act unbecomingly.
- E. Name calling is counter-productive because it often creates a problem that is bigger than the original problem that provoked the argument!
 1. Careless insults can create pain for years to come. How absurd!
 2. Solomon in Prov 12:8 "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
 3. Words are powerful. If we want to manage our conflicts well, we must use words that edify!

Rule #9--AVOID "STAMP-SAVING" (Prov 10:18)

- A. Some save up grievances like stamps, waiting until the book is full to cash it in.
 1. Ex. Unloading other complaints in rapid succession during an argument over something else.
 2. Be sure to only discuss one disagreement at a time.
- B. Don't let things build up! Foster the type of relationship where you can express irritations as they occur.
- C. Stamp-saving...
 1. Overwhelms the poor mate who is bombarded with so much all at once.
 2. Is disconcerting to the one who discovers that true feelings weren't revealed earlier.
 3. Breeds both a lack of trust as well as confidence.
- D. **The cure:**
 1. Express displeasure at the earliest convenient time.
 2. Mention it next time it occurs (if a recurring fault), and not during an argument about something else or choose to forget it forever!

Rule #10: Don't Focus on Winning. (Eph 5:21) "Submit yourselves one to the other in the fear of Christ."

- A. If we're not careful, our marriage conflicts can take on a life of their own.
 1. The focus can become **winning the argument rather than reaching a resolution.**
 2. When that happens, *everything changes.*
 - a. We begin to use every trick in the book so we can win.
 - b. We refuse to admit any wrong or acknowledge any validity in what the other person is saying, less we give them some advantage.
 - c. We begin to pick a part every little detail of what is said, i.e. "I don't forget to take out the trash all the time; I did once last year!"
 - d. The conversation begins to be dotted with challenges, i.e. "prove it" or "give me one example when I did that."
 3. When we reach that point, **no one will come out a winner.** We may win the battle, but ultimately lose the war...and the "good will" and mutual respect we both need and desire for a good relationship.

B. What we need to remember is that marriage is a *cooperative enterprise*.

1. If my goal is to **win and get my way**, then I'm going to make my spouse miserable.
 2. The goal should be to **reach a solution that will please God** and that both of us can live with. A good marriage provides for some "give and take."
 3. I've got to be unselfish and take into account the needs of my spouse as we try to work this out, **Phil. 2:3-4**.
 4. In **I Cor. 13:5** Paul says that love **"does not seek it's own."**
 5. We need to accept our share of the blame and never resort to threats or give ultimatums. We certainly should never use sex or money as weapon.
 6. We need to reach a conclusion that if possible will suit both, not just one.
- To do otherwise may help us win more arguments, but in the end, **we'll lose the war – and perhaps our marriage too!**

CONCLUSION:

- A. Take these home and make a pact to live by God's rules when managing conflicts. B. Mature partners know that differences are not wrong. Conflicts can be worked out fairly, amiably, and lovingly.
- C. Both must be honest so a wall of silence will not be built and drive them apart.
- D. Marriage run by GOD's principles can be a little bit of Paradise left to bless both man and woman in a sinful world.
- E. Remember: *"Marriages are made in heaven, but the maintenance contract must be maintained on earth."*
- F. God has the answers for our every need, do you rely and depend upon Him for help?

THE GIFT OF SUBMISSION: WHAT IT IS & IS NOT

“Wives: Be in Subjection to Your Husbands in Everything”

Ephesians 5:22-24

Special thanks to Doris Black for her excellent insights into this subject.

INTRODUCTION

- A. **Major foundation lesson of the family series has always been “Honor the Woman.”**
- B. **However, I confess to you that I think I have been too one-sided and overly simplistic. Today’s society needs to deal just as much with attitudes of the women towards men as vice-versa.**
 1. Many, even Christian women, have been so influenced by our culture, that they do not have a clue as to what a “*meek and quiet spirit,*” and being “*in subjection to your husbands even as you are unto the Lord in everything*” involves. (I Pet. 3:4, Eph. 5:22-24)
 2. It’s puzzling to me because subjection is not substantively different in marriage than in other areas. It is not unique to marriage. Why do we have so much trouble grasping what it means in the marriage relationship?
- C. **One of the reasons why we have trouble with this simple concept is because we have been infected by our feminist, politically-correct culture which has thrown out the Biblical pattern.**
 1. 1970s - “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.”
 2. 1993 - NOW - “A woman needs a man like a fish needs a net.”
 3. 1990s - Bumper stickers - “*A woman’s place is in control.*”
 4. Plaque in many homes - “The sentiments expressed by the man of the house are not necessarily those of the management.”
 5. Joke: “I know my wife’s in subjection and she told me I could say so.”
- D. **THESIS: This simple lesson today gets at the heart of many relationships, not the least being our relationship with the Lord. The essence of being a Christian is Jesus’s statement: “Not my will but thine be done.” Look at three areas:**
 1. What **SUBMISSION IS**
 2. What it **IS NOT**
 3. Interwoven throughout the discussion give some **Practical Guidelines**

I. WHAT SUBMISSION IS:

- A. **Ed Wheat - “The key to a successful marriage is: THE HUSBAND MUST BE 100% COMMITTED TO LOVING HIS WIFE AND THE WIFE MUST BE 100% COMMITTED TO BEING SUBMISSIVE.” He explains the dynamic this way:**

“As the husband loves his wife, she is going to be more submissive to him. As the wife submits to her husband, his love *for her* will surely grow. “What kind of love is a husband to bring to his wife? It is a strong, stable, mental attitude, always seeking nothing but the highest good for the one he loves. It is a love expressed in word and actions which motivates the one being loved to give of herself in return.”
- B. **What does it mean for a wife to be in submission to her husband?**
 1. The word submit comes from a military term which actually means to do an assigned job in an assigned way. A responsive and receptive wife, therefore willingly, demonstrates that she surrenders her freedom for his love, adoration, protection, and provision. Her response to his love should lead to an eagerness to meet her husband’s needs even before he asks.

2. It is an **attitude of willing adaptation** to that which God is leading her husband to do.
 3. **Submissiveness is the most important gift a wife can give her husband**. We know submission has to be a gift from her to him because it is contrary to all natural tendencies, just as agape (sacrificial love) is a gift from him to her that is also against natural tendencies. However, as both are given, it releases a **supernatural flow of love** between the husband and wife. Both are specially blessed and mutually satisfied as God intended.
- C. Any marriage problems among Christians can be boiled down to *spiritual problems* where the husband and/or wife are not fulfilling their God-given roles. Either:**
1. **The man is not properly loving his wife**, or...
Illust. #1 complaint women have about men is that they are selfish
 2. **The wife is not being submissive to her husband**.
Illust. #1 complaint men have about women is that they nag
 3. **KEY!** Both need to concentrate on doing **their jobs well** and not make it their jobs to be parental and constantly complain about how the other is not doing his/her job.
 - a) However, it is in order to give the husband or wife feedback.
 - b) It will backfire however, if you try to **force** the other party.
 - c) Marriage partners need to be serious about **giving the gifts of love and submission** as a matter of conscience. This empowers them to do so even when the *feeling* is absent. It avoids bitterness and resentment.
- D. We must understand the dynamics of a marriage the way God designed it to thrive and prosper and not view any of these in isolation.**
1. When God tells one party to do something, it is because it *fulfills some need* in the other person. It is not one-sided. There are interrelationships that need to be understood.
 2. Eph 5:22-24 – “Wives, be in subjection unto your husbands, **as unto the Lord**. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their **husbands in everything.**”
 - a) Be careful. It does not say: “Submit *when they act like the Lord.*”
 - b) Wow! “Let the wives be subject to their husbands **in everything.**” This is a tall order with no loopholes.
 - (1) Similar to “children obey your parents in the Lord..”
 - (2) As long as parents don’t tell their children to sin, they need to do what their parents say and submit as Jesus did to Joseph and Mary.
 - (3) Women say: “What if I don’t agree?” Or “what if I think he is making a terrible mistake, or what if I know better?” The text is clear, “*Submit to your husband in everything.*”
 3. It is good for every husband to memorize and focus on Eph 5:25 and for the wife to memorize and focus in on Eph 5:22-24. “Be in subjection to your husband as you are to the Lord... and to do so as the church is subject to Christ in everything.”
 4. **A man’s deepest need as a man is to be respected.** (When a woman submits, the man feels respected.)
 - a) A man who does not feel *admired* by his wife will not be happy in the marriage or function at his full potential. That is why the command of Eph 5:33 “...and the wife see that she **reverence her husband.**”
 - b) Def. Greek: “The wife is to *respect, admire, enjoy, fear or be in awe of, defer to, revere, adore, be devoted to, esteem, praise,* and deeply love her husband.” This is her job and the Bible indicates she will be personally benefited as she does it.

- c) If the wife **does not trust and respect her husband**, it is devastating to him and finally to the marriage.

"If a man's wife is able to look at her husband with eyes of reverence, he becomes a king among men!"

5. On the other hand, the **deepest need of a woman is to feel loved and cherished**. She needs to be honored and given a special place of privilege and preciousness. (*Eph 5, I Peter 3:7*) That is the atmosphere in which she blossoms and functions best.
- a) Ladies, isn't it true you can put up with a lot as long as you know you are loved and *feel loved* by your husband? Isn't it easier to submit to someone you *know* loves you?
- b) **Many men have second-rate wives because they treat them in a second-rate manner. Therefore, they never gain the real princess they would like to be married to.**
- c) **In many ways the wife is a reflection of her husband.**
6. That is **WHY** God tells the man to love and cherish his wife as his own body. The wife needs it!! That is why God tells the wife to submit to her husband – **nothing makes a man feel more respected than when his wife is lovingly and cheerfully submissive to him**. He desperately needs that to fulfill his potential as a man!!
7. Gen 2: Tells the man he is to "Depart from his father and mother and cleave to his wife..."
- a) Why? A woman needs to know she is the #1 woman in his life, ahead of his mother. She is first place under God!!
- b) This command is given in order to fulfill a *deep need in the woman*, so that the marriage will be strong.

E. What is submission? To fully understand the reasons behind it, go back to Eden.

1. Some think Eve's first sin was eating the fruit – no, it was **thinking she had a better idea than God**. The root of her sin was that she had her reasons for eating and doing the opposite of what God said.
2. In marital conflict, a major problem is that the wife **thinks she knows better** than her husband, (just like the teens think they know better than their parents). Even if the wife does, someone has to be in a position to make the final decision so there is not constant conflict.

Illust. A wife was given to Adam as his helper. Instead she takes the lead, thinks she knows better than God, and commits the first sin. One of the consequences is that she is not to be the leader.

3. This seems strange at first. **I Tim 2:11-14** tells us that Adam sinned **knowingly, willingly**, while *Eve was deceived* and convinced herself that what she was doing was okay. Isn't that worse?
- a) **Adam's first willful sin was to eat** simply because Eve asked him to. His second sin was to blame his wife and not take responsibility for his actions.
- b) In marital conflict today, men still frequently struggle with shifting blame onto the wife.
- c) Why did God make man the head of the house? It was not so much a reward as a responsibility that would force him to *grow up and not shift blame*.
- (1) God is saying: **The buck stops here, buddy!** No more blaming the wife.
- (2) When a woman rebels against her husband and puts her foot down, she gives him an "out" to avoid responsibility. She becomes more his mother than his adult lover.
4. Does that mean I have to do everything he tells me? Yes, as long as it is not sinful.

II. WHAT SUBMISSION IS NOT:

A. It is not being a doormat or mindless servant.

1. A woman has the right of appeal.

- a) Esther came in to the King and risked her life to ask that the king reconsider a decision he had made based upon some information she needed to share with him.
- b) She was **respectful and he listened and saved the day**. But it was simply a request, not a demand or willful defiance. God moved the King's heart to listen.

2. Ladies, you have an obligation to **speak the truth and point out sin** in *Eph 4:15*.

- a) **If he tells you to sin**, to engage in a lustful dance in public, like Vashti, refuse. You might respectfully say: "I submit to you because that is what my Lord tells me to do. However, in this case you are asking me to contradict my conscience and violate His higher law. I can't do that." (In essence she is saying the Lord pulls rank on a husband).
- b) **What if he is doing something sinful?** Tell him *why* you feel it is sinful and how deeply offended you are and concerned about him.

- (1) After you have clearly expressed why you think something is wrong, pray that God will touch his heart and haunt him with the truth of what you have said.
- (2) *Don't* become like a dripping faucet.
- (3) You can and should confront tyranny in love as did Jesus.
- (4) The pattern of Matt. 18:15 applies to fellow Christians and is appropriately applied between husband and wife who are also brother and sister.
- (5) If there is physical abuse or one is fearful for one's safety - RUN! Early Christians were not masochists; they fled the Roman authorities who persecuted them. However, it is not grounds for divorce and the goal is reconciliation. (I Cor. 7:5)

3. Ladies, you have an **obligation to give your husband your best thinking**. (A husband is a fool who doesn't solicit counsel).

- a) True oneness comes from sharing your mind, your body, your soul, and your emotions.
- b) Do not give him "*a piece of your mind*" but your best thinking. Otherwise you are cheating the husband of **important insight** he needs from his wife. (I Peter 3:7)
- c) However, after you have:

- (1) Determined that sin is not involved...
- (2) Given him your best thinking in a good discussion...
- (3) Exercised the right of appeal, as did Esther...
If the answer is still not what you prefer...**submit**.

d) Not because I say so, but because ***Eph 5:22-24* says so**.

- (1) Not because your husband is always right, but because **God says so**.
- (2) Not because your husband is smarter or superior, but because of *Rom 13:1-5*.
- (3) God made man the head of the house. He who rebels against one of God's authorities is rebelling against God!
 - a. You're not just telling your husband no. You are telling God no! That is open defiance!
 - b. Going head-to-head with God is a very serious thing to do. (*Heb. 12:29*)

B. It is not teaching a woman to trust in her husband but to trust God as he works through lines of authority. Some object: How can God command me to submit when He doesn't know my husband?

1. Some women have good husbands, others don't.
 - a) God set this up because He knew He would be directly involved through His lines of authority.
 - b) Even Jesus submitted to lines of authority. He said over and over again **“Not my will but thine be done.”**
 - (1) He stood before Pilate and was passive. Jn 19:11 “Don't you know I have the power of life and death over you? Jesus said, You would have no power if it was not given to you from above.”
 - (2) You may think you are the boss. You are not! God is the boss.
 - (3) The same thing is true with your husbands, ladies. Ultimately God is in control.
2. How does this work in the lives of Christian women today?
Three practical steps:

- a) When a decision is in the making, go off and **pray and plead your case to God**. Ask God to move and work in your husband's heart so that the best decision will be made.
- b) Then **go to your husband and tell him you are praying for God to give him wisdom**. Let him realize he is God's authority in the home.
- c) Then tell him that **you will submit** and cheerfully go along with the decision even as you submit to the Lord. That scares him because then he has to face up to responsibility and can't blame you. It forces him to grow up!!

3. **When you submit to your husband, you are not trusting in your husband, you are trusting in God.** When you do *His* will and submit you can be confident there will be a blessing in it and that *His will* will be done.
4. This is difficult because submitting to lines of authority is not in the American spirit!
 - a) Your children need to see how you subject to lines of authority so they will have modeled before them how to handle similar battles of will in their lives!
 - b) You can be a strong-willed woman and very persuasive, yet when the chips are down, **you can be submissive.**

C. This is not void if your husband is not a Christian.

1. **God works through lines of authority**, even if the individuals are not godly.
 - a) What if my husband is not a Christian? He is still your husband. It doesn't say, “Submit to your husband as long as he follows Jesus,” but “Submit to your husband as you submit to the Lord Jesus.”
 - b) Consider Jn 11:49-52. The high priest was not a godly man, but appointed by the Romans as a political crony. Nevertheless, God used Him to carry out His will and bring Christ to the cross to atone for the sins of man.
 - c) Consider how Jesus blasted the Pharisees as hypocrites. Yet He said, “Because they occupy Moses's seat, do what they say, but do not do what they do!!” (Matt 23:2)
 - d) **Moses went to Pharaoh and asked permission** for the children of Israel to go. God was behind Him, so why did he ask permission? God had a purpose that he worked *through Pharaoh*. (Ex 7:4-5). The whole world would know that He is God and that He would execute judgments against Egypt. The plagues attacked the entire religious system of Egypt.

D. It cannot be forced.

1. No one can force you to be submissive, even your husband.
 - a) Illust. He might grab your arm and twist it until you agree to do what he says like leading a horse to water but you can't make him drink. When you stop the force, it is over and usually lacks cooperation.

- b) Stephen Covey says, “You can hire a man’s back and his hands, but he has to volunteer his head and heart, which is the enthusiasm and the creativity you need for a truly productive employee.” This is also true in marriage. Love and submission are gifts that each one gives to the other. They cannot be forced or it damages the relationship!
2. Someone can **oppress you but no one can make you be submissive because it comes from the heart**. Husbands and wives are to give their hearts to each other until death.
- a) Submission is more than just going along. It is making it work so that it is successful even if it is something you disagree on.
 - b) It is not rubbing it in later and saying “I told you so” when it turns out your husband was mistaken.
 - c) It is realizing that being the head of the house is not always easy, just as being submissive is not always easy and having a compassionate, instead of a resentful spirit.

CONCLUSION

- A. We have looked at what submission is, what it is not, and given some practical guidelines.
- B. May we all have the faith to follow God’s pattern for the family and not the worldly standards that are all around us, but that are failing miserably.
- C. We must realize that when Christians have marital problems, it is an indication of spiritual problems that point to deeper issues. May we have the courage to deal with them and not ignore them so that God is glorified and we all receive the blessings God intended for His children.

GIVE HONOR TO THE WOMAN

I Peter 3:7

I. THE SELF-ESTEEM PROBLEM

- A. **God commands us “...not to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who gives us all things richly to enjoy.”** I Tim 6:17
1. God wants us to enjoy life and find pleasure from obeying Him.
 2. Paul commands us to “*rejoice always, again I say rejoice!*” Phil 4:4
- B. **Many Christians find it difficult to be joyful. Depression, low self-esteem, and discouragement are too commonplace.**
1. Women experience feelings of low self-esteem about being women more than men do about being men.
 2. Why is there a “gender gap” of as much as 5 to 1?
- C. **Unique gender needs seem instrumental here.**
1. Male – “failure in reaching goals”
 2. Female – “feedback from the closest circle of family/friends in the last few days”
 - a) Memorize this, men --- it explains so much of the “mystery.”
 - b) When a woman in your life seems irritable or upset, ask, “Have I (or anyone in the family, friends, or co-workers) said something to put her down recently?”
 - c) This will help you to understand a woman’s mood-shifts better.
 - d) If a man will just reflect on the lowest periods of his life, then he’ll begin to understand how a woman can feel in only a few hours.

II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- A. **The solution: two basic points from I Peter 3:7**
1. Husbands are to be *understanding and sympathetic* to their wives.
 2. Husbands need to demonstrate that they *honor* their wives.
- B. **Doing these two things will solve the fundamental problem in female self-esteem. With rare exception, if the wife is unhappy about who she is, the husband has failed in his role to properly honor and respect her!!!**
- C. **Some feminists are offended by I Peter 3:6 where the wife is to *call her husband “lord.”* The idea is to show deep respect and look up to her husband.**
1. *Mutual admiration society*” --- Notice the “likewise” in I Peter 3:7. The husband is also to esteem and look up to his wife!

2. With rules about authority, headship, and submission come rules about one's *attitude* that must accompany a husband's authority.
 3. Ideally, both should feel they got better than they deserved.
- D. To “ *dwell with them according to knowledge*” (vs 7), husbands must cultivate a sympathetic spirit and considerately “live with your wives in an understanding way.”**
1. Gary Smalley says: “Men are like buffalos and women are like butterflies.”
Emotionally, a man must be careful not to run over his wife!
 2. Ex. The wife is hurt and needs comfort, but the husband belittles her for “being too sensitive.” The Bible tells him, “*as you assert your authority, do so in an understanding way.*”
 3. **Give her your shoulder, not your mouth!** When she hurts, use compassion and understanding!
Answer *feeling with feeling, not with fact* !!
- E. To “give honor unto the wife as the weaker vessel” (vs 7) is critical.**
1. This needs constant effort. Her sense of who and what she is can be lost in a few days if it is not reinforced.
 2. NOT RECOMMENDED: “Honey, I told you when I married you I loved you, and if I change my mind I will let you know!!”
 3. How is the woman “weaker” or more fragile?
 - a) She is emotionally the more sensitive and intuitive which enables her to carry out her GOD-given roles.
 - b) GOD “*formed*” man from the dust (Gen 2:7) -- the same word used for shaping clay pots and utensils. In contrast, GOD “*fashioned*” the woman -- an artistic term used by skilled craftsmen when sculpting the most intricate items in the temple.
 - c) What is displayed in your hutch with lights and honor? Vessels that are fragile or indestructible? (Ever see an iron skillet in a curio cabinet?)
- F. The phrase “*heirs together of the grace of life*” (vs 7) may simply be the happy home that God wanted for us, rather than just salvation.**
1. A home in turmoil and an unhappy wife means little “grace.”
 2. Honoring your bride will lessen the tension and change the tone.
 3. If the attitude is right, the husband's “*prayers will not be hindered.*”

III. SOME PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- A. Tell her often how much you love & appreciate her! *Be creative!***
1. Make her feel valued and special every day if possible, not just on her birthday or Mother's Day.
Be specific: “Our kids are surely blessed to have a mother like you. You take such good care of them!”
 2. Illustration: “Honey, do you like my dress?” Good answer: “That dress isn't half as good looking as you are!” Better answer: “That dress is beautiful, but I like what's **IN** it a whole better!”
- B. Tell others!!**
1. Before friends say, “This is my wife and she's *all mine!*” (Use continual positive reinforcement. What you told her 3 weeks ago is gone!)
 2. Lavish praise and appreciation on your mother-in-law. Your wife will love the “sideways

compliments”!

3. Some women only survive because friends or bosses tell them how valued they are. For others, the “paycheck” is their only validation. But GOD wants this honor and esteem to come from the husband!!
4. The verbal intimacy in the Song of Solomon provides the husband with a pattern to follow!!

C. Change your attitude if necessary!

1. If you think your wife “can’t handle it” or is “a space cadet,” it will be extremely difficult to honor her!!
2. **Watch sarcastic put-downs!** Give her the benefit of the doubt. (Ex. She’s not nosey--just inquisitive!!)
3. **Don’t bark orders at her!** James Dobson says:
“A man may call his wife or daughter stupid or dumb and not mean it. The sad part is, a woman accepts and believes what her husband and father tell her.”
4. **Remember non-verbal disrespectful judgments.** Rolling your eyes at her (or worse, in front of others) wounds her deeply.
5. Gifts are important.
 - a) “The little things mean a lot!”
 - b) The price is not important but the message *behind* the gift!
 - c) Buy her what she wants, not what you want or want her to have!
 - d) Random acts of kindness say, “You are important to me!!”
6. **Watch comparisons!**
 - a) Don’t compare her unfavorably to your mother or first wife. Accept and love her as she is!!
 - b) If you are always bragging on other women, she will be thinking, “What about me?”
 - c) Be careful not to make her feel “taken for granted!”

CONCLUSION:

- A. Men feel this is a “one sided” lesson. The lesson is for the woman this time and not the reverse. However, the woman as “the helper suitable” is literally “the answer” to the man.
- B. If you honor your wife and love her the way she needs to be loved, she will respond! GOD built her to be that way!!
- C. Remember, much of a woman’s self-esteem is based on the positive feedback she receives “from the closest circle of family and friends in the last few days.”

HONORING THE WOMAN

(Thoughts on I Peter 3:7)

Do you agree that this is a neglected emphasis in our teaching today?

How many lessons have you heard on “Wives, be in subjection to your husbands” versus “Husbands, honor your wives?”

How can we best restore proper balance?

Gary Smalley, in his book If Only He Knew, claims that almost all marital problems can be traced back to the man not loving his wife like Christ loved the church.

What is your reaction to this? Is this fair?

Can you think of a reason why men should feel thrilled about this?

Women are designed as “responders”. How they treat us is often a mirror image of how they perceive we treat and feel about them. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Where does your wife feel she fits into your priorities?

Do you give your wife the benefit of the doubt and put her actions in the best light possible as a way to show love?

Will you make a commitment to pray more prayers privately and publicly, thanking the LORD for the important role that women play in the church and in the home?

To most women, the “little things are the big things.” Think of some little things you can do that will help your wife/daughters to feel loved and cherished.

MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL COVENANT

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Revised and adapted from Dr. Clark Warren's "The Triumphant Marriage" and
Bill Gothard's "The True Significance of the Wedding Covenant."

"Set me as a seal upon thy heart..." Song of Solomon 8:6

INTRODUCTION: REFRESHING & INSTILLING MARITAL COMMITMENT

- A. We have not entered into a "marriage contract" but a "marriage covenant!"**
(Mal 2:14, Prov 2:16f)
- B. What exactly is a covenant?**
 1. A Hebrew word: "In the sense of cutting; a compact made by passing between pieces of flesh"
 2. Examples are found in Gen 15:9-10, 17-18 and Jer 34:13, 18
- C. Our forefathers began many wedding traditions and understood this well. Over time, the original meanings have been lost.**
 1. "The True Significance of the Wedding Covenant" booklet opened my eyes.
 2. One covenant symbol: the different sides for seating the guests of the bride or groom represents the covenant relationship and the guests as "living sacrifices."
- D. A marriage is sacred. It is spiritual...heavenly. (Matt 19:6)**
 1. A "holy triune not a human duet!!"
 2. If you break your vow to your mate, you may still have to keep your vow to God ("until death do you part" not "until divorce do you part").
 3. "It is a snare to a man to say rashly, 'It is holy' and then to later make inquiry."
Prov 20:25 (½ of all divorces in 1997 occurred within the first two years!)
 4. The difference between a **covenant and a contract**:
 - a) A covenant is based on **trust**---a contract on **distrust**!
 - b) A covenant is based on unlimited responsibility --a contract on limited liability.
Illustration: God's promise to Abraham and all He went through to keep His Word demonstrate unlimited responsibility. Just as the traditional words "...for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health."
 - c) A covenant is lifelong and not to be broken --a contract can be voided by mutual consent.
Illustration: The rainbow in the sky reminds everyone that God's promise has no statute of limitations.

I. COVENANT SYMBOLISM IN THE WEDDING CEREMONY

- A. The groom enters first—why? He is the initiator of the covenant.**
- B. The father walks the bride down the aisle—why?**
 - 1. The parents are an important part of the ceremony.
 - 2. The father’s duty is to present his daughter as a pure gift. (Deut 22:13-21)
 - 3. The white dress symbolizes purity.
- C. The father gives the bride away to show the full blessing of the parents. This is the formal transfer of authority from the father to the groom after he has asked for the daughter’s hand in marriage. (Num 30:4-8).**
- D. The ring is a “token of the covenant.”**
- E. The couple is introduced to establish the changing of names.**
 - 1. *Illustration:* Abram’s name was changed to Abraham.
 - 2. Spiritually we wear the “new name” of Christian once we enter into a covenant relationship with God upon baptism.
- F. What is the significance of the guest book?**
 - 1. It should be signed after—not before. It indicates there are witnesses to the covenant who have a vested interest in supporting the marriage.
 - 2. The Armenians have a low divorce rate. When a couple gets in trouble, the godparents move in until they get it settled!
- G. What is the purpose of the receiving line? To give a blessing to the couple as in Ruth 4:11, 14f.**
- H. H. The food at the reception is for the covenant celebration. This is very similar to the Lord’s supper.**
- I. The couple feeds each other cake and they become “one flesh” in the eating of the cake, just as we become one in the eating of the bread. (I Cor 11:24f)**

II. DO WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH KEEPING VOWS & COMMITMENTS TODAY?

- A. A lax attitude in general makes the taking of our vows seriously difficult.**
 - 1. Ronald Reagan in 1981 fired the air traffic controllers because they broke a contractual agreement. Doubtful that would happen today.
 - 2. During the revolutionary war both sides respected vows so much that they avoided taking prisoners. Instead they simply made them promise they would not return to fight again. If they violated their honor and did so, then they were executed.
- B. Examine these scriptures that apply to the taking of vows:**
 - 1. Ecc 5:2-7
 - 2. Ps 15:4b (Zion dweller - swears to his own hurt and changes not!!!)
 - 3. Num 30:2
 - 4. I Sam 1:11-21 (Hannah’s vow)
 - 5. Josh 9:16-20

C. Commitment: the cornerstone of a triumphant marriage!

1. Consider the following quote about the nature of commitment:

“COMMITMENT ... is what transforms a promise into reality. It is the words that speak boldly of your intentions. It is the actions that speak louder than words. It is making the time when there is none, coming through time after time, year after year. Commitment is the stuff character is made of, the power to change the face of things. It is the daily triumph of integrity over skepticism.”

2. “*Marriage demands toughness, and toughness proceeds out of commitment. No marriage will ever be stronger than the commitments that serve as its infrastructure.*”

D. We ask couples to say some hard-hitting, heavy-duty vows before they get married. So where do we go wrong?

1. Are vows **treated superficially** with the preacher left to “perform the ceremony? The couple is so nervous they hardly think about or realize the **significance** .
 - a) I encourage couples to **write their own vows** and wedding ceremony.
 - b) Suggestion: Save the ceremony and go over it ...at least once a year on your wedding anniversary.
2. It is important that what you have vowed to each other be kept current and fresh! It is so easy to forget.

E. What matters is your current level of commitment

1. Often, the vows seem less vital and are less passionately held as time passes.
2. Sadly, many only vaguely remember what they said.
3. The commitment should be *active* not passive!!
Illustration: One may stay in a marriage by being passive. S/he doesn't leave, but doesn't *do anything* to make the marriage better either. Don't forget the *positive*, radical part of **active commitment**.

III. WE NEED THOROUGH, INSIGHTFUL UNDERSTANDING OF MARITAL PROMISES

A. We need a “*promise orientation*” that is highly enlightened.

B. The traditional vows have 6 separate parts:

1. I will **love you** as long as we both live (kindness, sacrifice)
2. I will **cherish and honor** you as long as we both live (thoughtfulness, attentiveness)
3. I will be to you what a husband or wife owes to a spouse (dedication to doing my part and meeting the other's needs)
4. I will **take you as you are** (acceptance)
5. I will **forsake all others** (faithfulness!!)
6. I will do all these things **for better or worse, in sickness and in health** (unconditionally serve and stay with you for as long we live)

C. WOW! What does that mean, practically speaking??

1. If we disagree, frustrate, disappoint, or hurt each other....?
2. If I think I don't get what I deserve...?
3. If I express how I feel, regardless of hardship...? I will keep my vows!

D. Now, REHEARSE THE PROMISES until they are BURNED INTO OUR BRAINS.

1. Marriage vows are usually spoken a single time, thus they have very little value in a marital crisis.
2. Dr. Clark Warren, author of "The Triumphant Marriage", suggests a change in frequency of the marriage vows.
 - a) Instead of "once-in-a-lifetime", 2 or 3 times a week for the first 10 years, and at least once a week for the rest of the marriage.
 - b) Verbalized regularly over a long period of time for tremendous power!!
 - c) HOW? Find a way that is natural, meaningful, and even fun! BE CREATIVE!!
3. What about you?
 - a) The more you can find **new and creative ways** to affirm the commitment the better.
 - b) **Recite it over and over** so that when troubles come the brain will trigger new ideas on how to fulfill these vows!!

CONCLUSION:

- A. Do your homework! Write your own concise summary of your vows.**
- B. Your marriage will benefit dramatically from a simple exercise designed to help both partners clarify and articulate promises.**

Here is a sample of what Gail and I came up with after looking over our original ceremony and thinking about the basic, most important needs that we each share.

I PROMISE...

(A renewal of our vows from Brent to Gail)

I promise I will do everything in my power to help you get to heaven,
to accept you, and to remain loyal to you always.

I promise to put you and our marriage second only to God and to be open
and honest with you always as we strive for oneness.

I promise I will cherish, honor, and support you in good times and bad
and strive to love you selflessly, like Christ loves the church, as I
meet your deepest needs.

I promise to pilot, provide, and protect you and our family and to do these things unconditionally until
death do us part...so help me God!!

I PROMISE...

(A renewal of vows from Gail to Brent)

I promise I will do everything in my power to help you get to heaven,
to accept you, and to remain loyal to you always.

I promise to put you and our marriage second only to God and to be open
and honest with you always as we strive for oneness.

I promise to admire, honor, and obey you in good times and bad
and strive to be an excellent keeper at home and be sensitive to your deepest needs.

I promise to love you and to do all these things
unconditionally until death do us part...so help me God!!

(Based on the fact that God has provided us with role-based relationships, I suggest you have different vows which focus in on each role. For help look at the handout of scriptures I have provided for you entitled "The Most Important Words about Husband and Wife.")

Refreshing and Re-instilling Marital Commitment

(Commitment and Vows in Marriage)

WORKSHOP WORKSHEET: STEPS TO RECONSTRUCT AND REFRESH YOUR VOWS

(Your marriage will benefit dramatically from this simple exercise designed to help both of you clarify and articulate the promises you have made to each other.)

1. What do you remember most about your wedding vows from memory? Quickly brainstorm together on a separate sheet of paper and see what you can piece together.
2. What vows have you heard said by others that you liked? Reflect upon what you have come to understand as vitally important to you and your marriage since your wedding day that could be added to a new, updated set of vows that you decide to commit to each other. Brainstorm together. Ask your mate for ideas as to what is important to him or her.
3. Look over the 6 parts listed on the handout for the traditional marriage vows and use this as a guide to help you reconstruct your vows. Can you put them in your own words that will have special meaning to you?
4. Given the different roles that God gives the man and the woman in marriage, look over the handout "The Most Important Words about Husband and Wife". Select from the scriptures some key concepts that reflect your unique roles that God would have you to commit to each other.
5. Condense all this into a brief list that you can both memorize and say to each other on a regular basis!! Periodic rewrites of the commitment statement will make it stronger and more meaningful.

Congratulations--you have done it!

Now write it out on a card, commit it to memory, and say it to each other regularly. You will crave and enjoy hearing your mate talk about the special kind of love you both share as you repeat your promises to each other. And let the kids overhear you say it or say it in front of them--it will teach them valuable lessons about marriage!!

The Most Important Words About Husband & Wife

"As therefore God's picked representatives, purified and beloved, put on that nature which is merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love binds all the virtues together in perfection. Let the peace of Christ guide all your decisions, for you were called to live as one, united body; and always be thankful. Let the full richness of Christ's teaching find a home among you...

~ Colossians 3:12-16a (Phillips)

"Let all bitterness and indignation and wrath [passion, rage, bad temper] and resentment [anger, animosity] and quarreling [brawling, clamor, contention] and slander [evil speaking, abusive, and blasphemous language] be banished from you, with all malice [spite, ill-will, or baseness of any kind].

~ Ephesians 4:31 (Amplified)

"Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God."

~ Romans 15:7 (New American Standard)

"Be subject to one another ["fit in with" each other] out of reverence for Christ...You WIVES must learn to adapt yourselves to your husbands, as you submit yourselves to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church and savior to the body. The willing subjection of the church to Christ should be reproduced in the submission of wives to their husbands in everything."

~ Ephesians 5:21 (Amplified)

"In a similar way you wives should be submissive to your own husbands, so that if any of them will not be persuaded by the message, they may without message be won over by the conduct of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior."

~ 1 Peter 3:1,2 (New Berkeley)

* * * * *

"...Let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband, that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates him and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly.

~ Ephesians 5:33 (Amplified)

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

~ Gen. 2:24 (New American Standard)

“Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

~ Matthew 19:6 (New American Standard)

“Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord...”

~ Malachi 2:15b, 16a (New American Standard)

“The HUSBAND must give his wife the same sort of love that Christ gave to the church, when He sacrificed Himself for her...So men ought to give their wives the love they naturally have for their own bodies. The love a man gives his wife is the extending of his love for himself to enfold her. Nobody ever hated his own body; he feeds it and looks after it.”

~ Ephesians 5:25,28-29a (Phillips)

“...Let each man of you [without exception] love his wife [as being in a sense] his very own self.”

~ Ephesians 5:33a (Amplified)

“Husbands, love your wives - be affectionate and sympathetic with them - and do not be harsh or bitter or resentful toward them.”

~ Colossians 3:19 (Amplified)

“...You husbands need to live understandingly with your wives as with a weaker vessel, rendering them honor as joint heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your praying may not be hindered.”

~ 1 Peter 3:7 (New Berkeley)

“Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy; it is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited, arrogant and inflated with pride; it is not rude [unmannerly], and does not act unbecomingly. Love [God’s love in us] does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking. It is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it - pays no attention to a suffered wrong. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening]. Love never fails - never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end... And so faith, hope, love abide; [faith, conviction, and belief respecting man’s relation to God and divine things; hope, joyful and confident expectation or eternal salvation; love, true affection for God and man, growing out of God’s love for us and in us], these three, but the greatest of these is love.

~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13 (Amplified)

“Do two walk together, except they...have agreed?”

- Amos 3:3 (Amplified)

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”

~ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (New American Standard)

“So let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and for mutual upbuilding [edification and development] of one another.”

~ Romans 14:19 (Amplified)

“...Being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard the other as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

~ Philippians 2:2-4 (New American Standard)

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”