

MARRIAGE TUNE UP

Dealing with Conflict in Marriage

Lesson #5

Conflict is common in marriage. This is because people are sinners and have different ideas and opinions. Everyone has to deal with conflict, but most deal with conflict in unbiblical ways. Anger, yelling, screaming, and throwing things against the wall are expressions of adult temper tantrums. Others clam up, play mind games, use cold-war tactics, and manipulation. Still others use fugitive tactics and slam the door, leave the house, or hide themselves in their room. You may even have your own specialized tactics for dealing with conflict, but are they biblical? What does the Bible say about dealing with conflict? In this lesson we will examine some biblical principles and practical ideas for dealing with conflict in your marriage. Our approach will be to first deal with the root issues that often lead to conflict. Second, we will discuss practical ideas for dealing with conflict in a Christ honoring way.

I. CONFLICT DEFINED

Our word conflict comes from a Latin word that means “to strike together.” Webster defines conflict as: *A competitive or opposing action of incompatibles; An antagonistic state or action arising from differing ideas, interests, or persons; A mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands. A hostile encounter, fight, battle or war. A collision.*¹

II. ROOT ISSUES WHICH FEED CONFLICT

A. Selfishness

Phil. 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

1. What do these verses teach is the opposite of selfishness and empty conceit?
2. How often do you think selfishness is the root cause of conflict?
3. What is the opposite of being humble in mind and how does it relate to conflict?

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, pg. 235.

III. EXERCISING SELF-CONTROL

A. **I Cor. 9:25-27** And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.

1. What parallel analogy is Paul using above that relates to self-control?
2. How many things are we to exercise self-control in? Why?

B. **II Pet. 1:5-8** Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Why do you think that Peter includes self-control with diligence, faith, moral excellence, knowledge, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love?
2. How often do you think unbiblical ways of dealing with conflict are related to a lack of self-control?
3. In what circumstances can a person not exercise self-control and still be obeying and giving glory to God?

IV. CONTROLLING YOUR ANGER

A. Selfish anger

1. **Prov. 29:22** An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.
 - a. Why does selfish anger lead to strife?
 - b. Why does a hot-tempered person abound in transgression?

2. **Prov. 29:11** A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.
 - a. Why do you think a fool loses his temper?
 - b. Why do you think a wise man holds his temper back?

B. Righteous Anger

1. **John 2:13-17** And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me."
 - a. Why did Jesus get angry?
 - b. Why wasn't Jesus' anger sinful?
 - c. What would be a good definition of righteous anger?
2. **Eph. 4:26-27** Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.
 - a. What are some legitimate examples of righteous anger within marriage?
 - b. If we don't resolve anger quickly, what are some of the consequences we can expect?
 - c. What is wrong with not reconciling with our spouse when we have a disagreement and becoming angry; and instead trying to just forget about it and not bother discussing it?
 - d. Should we always tell our spouse we are angry with them and always talk about it?

V. **BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT**

- A. **Prov. 10:12** Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.

What is one of the antidotes for conflict in this verse? Why?

- B. **Prov. 25:15** By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

What are two techniques for dealing with conflict in this verses?

- C. **James 1:19-20** This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

What three methods for dealing with conflict are found in these verses?

VI. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER**

Read the sentences below and discuss their meaning, implications, and or relationship to conflict resolution.

- A. My mate is not my enemy, therefore I will never attack my mate but address the problem instead.
- B. If something that my mate does bothers me, I will take responsibility for it as my own problem to deal with, not my partner's. If it is a gray area, I may ask my mate to change, but if they do not then I will ask God to help me change. I must take responsibility for the things that bother me.
- C. The more someone loves you, the more power you have to hurt them with your words. Words hurt worse than sticks and stones and can leave wounds that last a lifetime.
- D. People, things, and circumstances don't make us angry. Every time you are angry, it is because you have chosen to be angry.
- E. You can have conflict and deal with it without sinning.

- F. You must learn to deal with conflict in the fruit of the Spirit. You cannot resort to sinful and unbiblical tactics and still be right with God. (*Gal. 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*)

- G. Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (I Cor. 13:4-8)

- H. Some people try to justify sinful ways of dealing with conflict by saying, “It is “normal” to have conflict and fight.” It may be normal to have conflict, but it is not acceptable to God for Christians to fight with one another.

VII. **UNBIBLICAL TECHNIQUES FOR DEALING WITH CONFLICT**

- A. **The silent pouter**

- B. **The volcano**

- C. **The blame shifter**

- D. **The runner**

- E. **The melodrama expert**

- F. **The trial lawyer**

- G. **The expert of feigned ignorance**

- H. **The curator of a deluded perfect memory**

- I. **The button pushing, emotionally-starved masochist**

VIII. **SOME THINGS YOU CAN TRY WHEN CONFLICT ARISES**

- A. When conflict comes, try holding hands as you discuss the problem. Do not move away from your mate but get closer.
- B. Identify your problem by saying, "I have a problem. When you do . . . it makes me feel. . ." kinds of statements. Do not say or infer that your spouse is the problem.
- C. If you are too frustrated or too mad to speak without sinning, tell your spouse you are too mad to talk and immediately take some time to pray to God. After you talk with God about it, then seek out your partner and discuss it with them.
- D. Remember that you are responsible for your actions, words, and emotions. Your spouse does not make you feel or respond the way you do.
- E. Don't use superlative generalizations such as "never" or "always" or "there you go again" or "I just don't want to talk about it" or "I don't care!" These statements only throw fuel on conflict and make it burn hotter.
- F. If you have a lot of problems try writing them down on paper, then discuss them one by one with your spouse.
- G. If one or both of you are real tired or the circumstances do not permit a lengthy discussion, call a truce and set a time to discuss the problem as soon as you are able. If one of you is having hormone fluctuations, then postpone the discussion for three days and you may discover that it has miraculously become a non-issue.

IX. **HOMEWORK**

- A. Discuss any unbiblical conflict tactics you presently use in your marriage.
- B. Discuss how each of you deals with conflict and if you match any of the caricatures found in this lesson.
- C. Do you listen well and give your mate equal time to express themselves?
- D. Do you place the focus on the problem or on the person?
- E. After discussing your methods of dealing with conflict, make a plan to deal with conflict in the future. Express to your mate how you would like to act and respond in the future. The next time you have a conflict deal with it in a biblical way. Continue to refine your methods of dealing with conflict if the plans you have made do not work.