

**YOU'RE MARRIED,
NOW WHAT?**



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INTRODUCTION

Over time, husbands and wives have disagreements about one thing or another that may eventually lead to an impasse. Both of them think they are right and neither one is willing to concede or compromise. Most couples don't know what to do at this point because they lack the skills needed to resolve the situation. So they can easily become frustrated, angry, and tempted to say or do something they might regret later.

Before you know it, seeds of bitterness are planted. Kindness, gentleness, and laughter disappear. No more loving gestures, just cold stares and scorn. Where once they enjoyed lively conversations and a close rapport, there's silence. Neither of them wanted this to happen yet they feel helpless to stop it. It's as if some monstrous force intruded into their lives and made them enemies. Some couples manage to survive by tip-toeing around sensitive issues, but the awkwardness and discontent is still there.

Just the daily routine of life can take a toll on marriage. Many become disheartened and afraid that life is passing them by. They feel like a prisoner, locked in a mundane existence with a mediocre mate, and think they've fallen out of love, so they want out. Can these relationships be restored? Can these marriages be saved? Absolutely!

The principles in this book can not only save struggling marriages but can also put relationships with friends, family, or associates back into mint condition. So if you're in a relationship that just needs a little tune-up or in one that requires a complete overhaul, turn this page and continue reading.

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MARITAL MAYHEM

First, let's take a look at how marriages are doing these days. It's not a pretty sight. Over half of them end in divorce and many more are struggling to stay afloat. Not many people are happily married. Couples wonder why they should bother to get married in the first place, so they just move in together. Why not? Who's going to condemn them?

In our modern, yet pagan society, dating has gone by the wayside. Now it's "hanging out", "hooking up", and "moving in". That's how it's done in movies, soap operas, and sitcoms, so that's how it's done all across the country. Face it, "shacking up" is accepted by most people, and what used to be considered immoral is now the norm.

People who cheat on their spouses don't think they're committing adultery, they're just "having an affair". People don't have a problem with having "one night stands" because everybody else is doing it. To them, adultery and fornication are archaic Bible words that don't apply to modern-day societies anymore.

Many pastors refuse to condemn sex outside of marriage and other immoral behavior because they're afraid of losing their congregations. Consequently, people believe sex is permissible as long as it's between two consenting adults. Fornication . . . no problem? Adultery . . . no problem, as long as it's between two consenting adults? How can people be so deceived? They have no idea how degenerating and harmful sex outside of marriage is. This is to be expected when people ignore God and His Word.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 . . . It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2) Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

Hebrews 13:4 . . . Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

God does not take disobedience lightly. People who committed fornication or adultery in Old Testament times were stoned to death. While it's true we're not under the Mosaic Law and people are not stoned to death anymore, fornication and adultery are still very serious sins that severely damage or completely destroy marriages and families.

Marriage is about commitment. Fornication avoids commitment and adultery breaks commitment. Marriage is more than a wedding ceremony or a marriage license. It's a divine institution designed by God where a man and a woman officially bind themselves together by means of a formal commitment of fidelity to one another before God and witnesses.

Why would a man and woman claim to love one another yet refuse to make a binding commitment of fidelity to God and to each other? Why would a woman submit to a man who is not willing to make a binding commitment to protect and provide for her? Why would a man protect and provide for a woman who is not willing to take his name or make a binding commitment to submit to him? What kind of relationship is that, and what are its chances of enduring for a lifetime? She would have no security and he would have no respect.

I'm not suggesting that getting married is a guarantee your relationship will last a lifetime or that marriage is easy. Combining two sexes, two sin natures, two personalities, and two different backgrounds together under one roof can be a formula for disaster unless the

couple knows what they're doing. How well do you think a marriage is going to work for a couple who doesn't know how God designed it to operate or what their roles are?

Even when a husband and wife are dedicated and faithful to one another, they can still become frustrated, angry, confused and not know what to do. What can they do? Complaining doesn't help. Unloading their problems on others doesn't help either even if others are sympathetic. They need answers but they won't find them looking through the Yellow Pages. Only the pages of God's Word will give them the answers they're looking for.

God has given detailed instructions for husbands and wives in His "Operating Manual", so there's no reason to just do the best you can and hope you're right. Ignorance of the Bible causes more problems than anything else although some Bible students still have problems. Their problem is arrogance. They're just plain stubborn and determined to do what they want to do even when they know it's wrong. Whether it's ignorance or arrogance, violating God's plan brings on pain and suffering as surely as violating the laws of gravity.

GOOD NEWS

God designed marriage to be the most wonderful and intimate relationship anyone can have outside of a relationship with Him. He tells us through His Word how to make marriage everything He designed it to be. Your marriage can be better than you ever dreamed possible. It won't happen overnight. It'll take time and effort, but it can happen. It can become a reality for you. So where do you start?

Learn and follow God's instructions. That's it. It's not complicated at all. Most people do things their own way because they simply don't know God's way. That's why this book was written, to show you how to do it His way, the perfect way, the way that guarantees marital bliss. All that's needed is a willingness to learn and follow His instructions.

That's the key: a willingness to change. As you read this book, you will be forced to make a few simple decisions. Will you obey God or ignore Him? Will you trust Him enough to try His way or will you continue to do things your way?

NEW STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

From this point on, I will be speaking to you as if you have come to me seeking solutions to your marital problems.

THE FIRST STEP

Congratulations! By reading this book, you've already taken the first step to get your marriage back on track. It's a sign you care about your marriage and realize what you've been doing hasn't worked very well so far. That's major. No progress can be made until you realize you need help.

We all agree changes must be made before a struggling or broken marriage can be repaired. The problem is, most people think it's their **spouse** that's got to change. They say, "If she would just stop _____, everything would be all right," or "If he would just start _____, everything would be fine". WRONG!

You've probably already tried everything to change your spouse and it hasn't worked, has it? Why? Because you can't change others; you can only change yourself. But here is the neat thing. When you change yourself, it produces changes in your spouse. They will find it more and more difficult to find fault with you or to hate you. Changes in yourself will inspire changes in them.

God never tells us to try to change our spouses. Our job is to obey Him and let Him make the changes in them. Once you realize this, life becomes a whole lot easier with less frustration and fewer confrontations.

Old habits and beliefs are not easy to change, but they can be changed if, and only if, **YOU** are willing to change.

You must be **HOT** : **HUMBLE, OBJECTIVE, TEACHABLE.**

HUMILITY is a submissive attitude that excludes arrogance. It is a willingness to listen and learn from someone else. It's recognizing that you don't have all the answers and need help in certain areas. Humble people are open to correction, new ideas, and new ways of doing things.

Many people confuse humility with humiliation but they're not the same. First of all, you are humiliated when you are demeaned, degraded, or disgraced. It makes you feel ashamed or embarrassed. Humility on the other hand is a virtue that is very honorable and is never demeaning or degrading. It's never humiliating to be humble; it is quite the opposite. Humility is a strength, not a weakness. You should be glad that you're humble, not embarrassed.

Proverbs 11:2 . . . When pride [arrogance] comes, then comes dishonor, But with the humble is wisdom.

Proverbs 29:23 . . . A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor.

Matthew 23:12 . . . And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

James 4:6 . . . God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

OBJECTIVITY means you don't take things personally; you're not hypersensitive; you don't wear your feelings on your sleeve. Objective people make decisions based on principles and facts rather than emotions. It's not what you feel but what you learn, know, and think, that matters. Unfortunately, most people make decisions based solely on their emotions.

Objective people are willing to admit they're wrong. Some people would rather get a divorce than admit they're wrong about anything. They refuse to take any responsibility for their failing marriage. They often blame their own bad behavior on their spouse. They think the horrible things they say and do is their spouse's fault. Why do they think it's their spouse's fault? Because their spouse made them angry. You see, if their spouse had not made them angry, they would not have thrown a temper tantrum. So the temper tantrum is their spouse's fault. What an infantile rationalization and what audacity to blame their lack of control on their spouse.

Objectivity is essential. Both the husband and the wife must take responsibility for their own actions. How hard is it to say, "I was wrong" and "I'm sorry"? It's not hard for a humble person, but it's nearly impossible for someone who is arrogant to do that. When you take responsibility for being wrong, stress and tension is immediately removed from the situation. The focus changes from finding fault to finding a solution. Remember, blaming your spouse is the problem, not the solution.

TEACHABILITY means you are willing to listen, learn, and change. It's a decision to really listen to someone without interrupting them or saying "yeah, but" before they've finished speaking. It's being willing to hear people's ideas, to try new things, to spend time and to put forth effort to do things differently in order to make things better. It's being determined to stick with the training even though it may be awkward or uncomfortable at first. People who resist training and make excuses for themselves are stubborn and foolish, not teachable.

THE BLAME GAME

Do you accuse your spouse of being more to blame than you? Who cares who's more to blame? It's not about blame! There is not one verse in the Bible that tells us to blame or accuse anyone. In fact, it tells us not to judge others. Placing blame on the other person will not solve your problems. You must face this fact. Your marriage will die if you don't stop blaming your spouse while making excuses for yourself.

So, if you've been blaming your misery on your spouse, your family, your kids, your friends, your job, your boss, your circumstances, or anything else, **stop it!** Quit blaming others for your unhappiness. You are responsible for your own happiness. No one can make you happy but **You**. True happiness is not affected by what other people do or don't do. Happiness comes from what is in your soul, from what **You** are thinking.

It is **YOU** who are responsible for your anger. It is **YOU** who are making yourself angry, sad, hurt, afraid, anxious, and frustrated. No one can make you feel that way but **YOU**. **YOU** do these things to yourself in your own mind. It's the mental attitude sins in your soul that's making you miserable. So what can you do? If you haven't trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, the solution is to accept the free gift of eternal life by trusting in Him as your Savior and your sins will be forgiven.

John 3:36 . . . He who believes in the Son [Jesus Christ] has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
1 Peter 3:18 . . . For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God . . .

If you've already done that, then you need to take responsibility for your sins, acknowledge them to God the Father, and He will graciously forgive you.

1 John 1:9 . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Excusing yourself and blaming others for your own ugly, bitter, sarcastic, hateful, and revengeful behavior **MUST END!** Do you honestly think that wining, complaining, judging, accusing, badgering, blaming, or yelling at your spouse is going to make them a better person? Will it cause them to love you more? When has that ever worked? You can't force

someone to change. They've got to want to change, and seeing you making changes in your life will make them more willing to make changes in their life.

People who don't believe this often become scorekeepers? A scorekeeper is a person who blames their spouse for their failing marriage. They keep a running account of their spouse's contributions compared to how much they have contributed to the relationship. The record is probably not on paper, but it doesn't have to be because it's indelibly recorded in the scorekeeper's head.

When the account gets too far out of balance, the offending party is confronted. They receive an itemized list of complaints along with a warning. The scorekeeper may threaten to make life miserable unless their spouse starts contributing more to the marriage. Or, they may try to balance the account by reducing their own efforts towards the relationship. It's the "If you don't do your part, I won't do mine" approach. How well do you think that one works?

You should know by now that blaming someone else for your misery won't make you happy. On the contrary, it's a way you give yourself permission to stay angry and embittered towards them.

I hope you get the point. The real problem with your marriage is **YOU**, and the solution to your marriage is **YOU**. A great marriage is not based on finding the right person. A great marriage depends on **YOU** being the right person.

By the way, you're never responsible for your spouse's bad decisions and behavior. You're only responsible for your own behavior. It's **YOU** that's gotta change and no one can make that happen but **YOU**.

None of us are perfect. Therefore, tolerance and forgiveness are essential. We all need to be tolerated and forgiven from time to time, and when we blame rather than forgive, our marriages suffer. Divorce lawyers love it when husbands and wives point their fingers at one another. You have to make a decision, would you rather hold a grudge or hold your mate?

THE GRASS IS NOT GREENER

Those having marital difficulty are tempted to start thinking the "grass is greener on the other side of the fence". That's a lie. Finding a new and better man or woman will never make you happy, either. It's **YOU** becoming a better man or a better woman that will make you happy. Rather than looking for a better wife or a better husband, BE ONE!

Over time, the passion and excitement you had at the beginning of your relationship fades. Some mistakenly call this "falling out of love" and think the solution is to try to go back and recapture those passionate feelings with their spouse. If that doesn't work, they start looking around for somebody else. WRONG! WRONG! WRONG!

What they don't realize is that it's impossible to sustain any relationship with feelings. Emotions have no thought. They were designed to respond to thought. Thought leads. Emotions follow. We get into trouble when we allow our emotions to do the leading because that's when we stop thinking.

People who live by their emotions are extremely unstable and can't be trusted because their feelings can change from one minute to the next. But those who live by principles,

ideals, and Bible doctrine are stable and reliable. That's the stuff that makes a strong durable marriage. Passionate feelings are fun, but they never last and are certainly not a foundation on which to build a marriage.

Over time, commitment, trust, and communication bear fruit that is far better and more satisfying than passionate feelings could ever produce. Just remember, passion is impossible to maintain. Efforts to rekindle the flame with your spouse will dwindle down before long and you might be tempted to start up a new flame with someone else. But it will sizzle out too. Forget about starting flash fires and start following God's instructions which will generate long-lasting embers that endure a lifetime.

In her book, Passion and Purity (pg. 181), Elisabeth Elliot addresses this issue:

“About this business of falling out of love. Everybody does it, you know, sometimes before they get married, but sometimes afterwards. Modern folks simply bug out of the marriage . . . they feel no obligation to keep vows, vows made foolishly, they believe.

There is something to be said for making an adult choice and sticking to it. “Being in Love,” wrote C.S. Lewis, in Mere Christianity, is a good thing, but it's not the best thing. There are many things below it, but there are also things above it. You cannot make it the basis of a whole life. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. Now no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all . . . In fact, the state of being in love usually does not last . . .

But of course ceasing to be ‘in love’ need not mean ceasing to love. Love . . . is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by the grace which both partners ask and receive from God . . . They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be ‘in love’ with someone else. ‘Being in love’ first moved them to promise fidelity; this quieter love enables them to keep their promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run; being in love was the explosion that started it.”

Leaving one marriage to begin another one with someone else may seem exciting and like it'll end your misery, but marriage can't make anyone happy. It's like anything else; it's what **YOU** make it. It can be rewarding but it takes hard work and sacrifice. Consider the following:

- 1) Another person may seem perfect at first and the excitement and passion in getting to know someone new is alluring, but it doesn't last. It will soon wear off. Reality and routine quickly set in and you see them as they really are, warts and all.
- 2) It's doomed to fail because you take your same old bad habits and attitudes from your last relationship into the new one. It's foolish to think a new relationship will work when you refuse to learn the skills needed to make the old one work.
- 3) The chances of a new relationship succeeding are slim because it will complicate your life. The many problems that come with the new relationship will be added to ones from your old relationship making life more, not less, difficult.

FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES

TRUST

No relationship can survive without trust. Honesty at all times is imperative. Dishonesty will kill a relationship faster than anything. You can't respect someone you don't trust. A liar lacks virtue and integrity that are the building blocks of a strong, unfading love.

So never lie to your spouse. Don't even tell a little white lie that may seem innocuous because there's no such thing as an inconsequential lie. It's very easy for lying to become a habit and the next thing you know, you have graduated to bigger, more harmful lies. One lie leads to another and then another until eventually you're caught. Trust takes time to develop but can be lost in an instant. Then it becomes difficult or even impossible to regain.

RESPECT

All couples clash from time to time and that's when the temptation to disrespect your mate is the strongest. Once shouting and name-calling begins, mutual respect is lost and disrespect takes over.

Husbands and wives cannot afford to disrespect each other. Love can only flourish in an environment of respect. Respect manifests itself through courtesy, consideration, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity towards one another.

Ways to maintain mutual respect:

1. Common courtesy should be practiced at all times. Saying "thank you", "excuse me", and "pardon me" are common courtesies that must not be neglected.
2. Don't interrupt your spouse when he or she is speaking.
3. Listening to your spouse is a way of showing respect to them. And remember, it's when both the male and the female perspectives are considered that the best decisions are made.
4. Tolerate your spouse's errors and weaknesses rather than pointing them out and making a big deal over them. Be gracious to them so they will appreciate it and be more willing to overlook your weaknesses.
5. Considering what your spouse is going through and what they might be thinking or feeling will help you be less combative. Your spouse will appreciate your consideration.

Things that must be avoided at all costs:

1. Never, never, never, resort to violence of any kind, and that goes double for the husband. You must never allow yourself to lose control by forcing your will on your spouse. It's wrong, it's a sin, and it's a crime. Don't ever do it!
2. Never shout or scream at your spouse. It demonstrates that you can't control your emotions and that you haven't learned proper communication skills to express yourself as an adult. Screaming is what a brat does when he doesn't get his way.

3. Don't talk down to your spouse or try to degrade them. Sarcasm is a weapon used to gain the advantage over someone in order to manipulate them. It is a spiteful tactic used to win an argument. It does tremendous harm to a relationship especially when it's done in front of other people or children. Its goal is to humiliate them in order to get the upper hand.
4. Do not curse your spouse or call them bad names. It's crass, vulgar, and low class. Your spouse may not remember anything about an argument except the bad name you called them, and they may remember that for a long, long time.
5. Never badmouth your spouse to other people. Gossiping about your spouse is hitting below the belt. It's done by weak people who are seeking sympathy. They are full of vindictiveness and self-pity; they sneak around trying to convince others that they are being victimized. It's called "playing the victim". The goal is to poison everyone against your mate so others will hate them as much as you do. If you're guilty of doing this, you better think about what will happen if your marriage gets back on track and you've already convinced everyone that you've living with a monster. A little song goes like this:

*"Gossip, gossip, evil thing! Much unhappiness it brings.
If you can't say somethin' nice, don't talk at all is my advice."*

The exception to this is if you are in a marriage where your spouse is physically abusing you. In that case, telling others about it isn't gossiping; it's protecting yourself. Seeking help when you're in danger is not only the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is to marriage what oxygen is to breathing. You can't survive without it. Some have described a happy marriage as a long conversation that seems too short. When couples stop talking, they're in trouble. Problems cannot be solved when people don't talk to one another. Giving the other person the silent treatment is exactly what your marriage does not need! That is true for all of your relationships.

Good communication requires not only talking, but listening. I mean really listening. Listening is not waiting for your spouse to stop talking so you can say what you want to say. It's thinking about what the other person says and then responding to it. It's amazing how many couples carry on what they think are conversations and no one is listening. They just take turns blasting away at each other.

James 1:19 . . . This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger . . .

Much of the conflict that occurs in marriage is due to lack of communication or miscommunication. Communication is a skill few possess these days. Watching TV, surfing the internet, and listening to music on i pods do not require communication skills. Most people can't express themselves because their vocabulary has shrunk down to an embarrassing level. They resort to four letter words and expletives because they don't know how to express themselves any other way.

Couples sometimes clash over the littlest things that have nothing to do with the real problem. The real problem usually turns out to be a lack of communication. A huge fight can start over something as trivial as what to watch on TV or socks lying on the floor. The TV or socks are used as an excuse to release the wrath that has been building up inside. Why not talk about it before it becomes a big deal and you're ready to explode?

It would help if people expressed what they would like to see happen rather than focus on what they don't like. Droning on and on about what you don't like is negative and tends to bring everybody down. Your spouse is much more likely to listen and not become defensive if you explain what they could do that is pleasing to you rather than complain about what they're doing that displeases you. The idea is to inspire them to do something positive rather than condemn them for doing something negative.

You'll never have a happy, contented mate if you are judgmental and condemning. An upbeat, positive attitude that's quick to forgive and forget is a key ingredient for a happy marriage. So while it is good to be upfront and open with your mate, this doesn't mean you should bring up and discuss every off-handed remark or thoughtless act. We are to tolerate each other's foibles and missteps.

But some things cannot be overlooked. There may be an injustice done that you cannot tolerate. That's when it's time for a powwow. Discussing it with them affords you the opportunity to humbly and objectively give your perspective on it. That's the way to handle it.

There is always trouble when people play mind games with one another. Instead of being honest, straightforward, and letting the spouse know something is wrong, they throw out subtle hints, make innuendos, or playact in a feeble attempt to get their point across. For instance, the wife may be extra quiet to demonstrate that she's put out with her husband. So he asks her what's wrong and she barks back in an irritating tone, "Nothing!"

Something is obviously wrong, and he knows that if he says, "OK" and goes on his merry way, things will get worse. But, if he asks her again, she responds with added sarcasm, "You don't know"? She's trying to humiliate him for something she thinks he did wrong when he doesn't have a clue what she's talking about. Now, he's insulted because she's insinuating, he's an idiot for not knowing what she's talking about. So, he gets angry, and the fight begins.

Now let's start over and do it right. The first thing she should do is give him the benefit of the doubt that he didn't purposely try to offend or hurt her. It could be that he is struggling with an issue and needs a little time to sort things out with God so he can then sort things out with her. She must keep her emotions in check and not allow herself to become angry, exasperated, impatient, or critical. Remember, there's no such thing as a perfect man or a knight in shining armor.

But if it's something that really bothers her, she should give him her opinion about it and how it hurt their relationship in a calm, loving manner. She must be careful that she doesn't have a condemning attitude that would put him on the defensive. She needs to give him a chance to respond, and she should listen to his side of the story. After she hears all the facts, she may realize he wasn't wrong after all, or he may realize there was no excuse for what he did and apologize.

But what if he maintains his innocence while she insists that he's guilty? The woman should put the matter in the Lord's hands and let Him deal with her husband. She is not to pout or be embittered against him and should continue to submit to his leadership. Furthermore, the husband is not to pout or be embittered against her either, but continue to be gentle and loving, even if he thinks she overacted or is unjustifiably upset.

Both of them need to put it behind them and move on. If your mate refuses to let it go and remains angry and spiteful, you are not allowed to retaliate. You can better resist the temptation to strike back if you remember that your obstinate mate will get an attitude adjustment from the Lord. That's what will happen as long as you stay out of it.

STRUCTURE

Marriage is a divine institution, which means God invented and designed it to work for all mankind, not just Christians. There are three basic rules:

RULE #1: HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES

Ephesians 5:25 . . . Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;

Ephesians 5:28-29 . . . So, husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,

Ephesians 5:33 . . . Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Colossians 3:19 . . . Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.

The love required of the husband is not a passionate or emotional type of love. It is an unconditional love that is always thoughtful and kind. He may sometimes feel more like fighting with his wife than loving her, but what he feels like doing doesn't matter. He must be considerate and gentle with her even when she doesn't deserve it because God requires it of him.

Husbands demonstrate their love by what they **do** and what they **say**. It is much easier for most husbands to do the former than the latter. They don't think they need to tell their wives they love them because they show it every day. They go to work, take care of the cars, mow the lawn, rake leaves, make repairs, and spend time with the kids to give her a break. Showing is more important than telling for men. But wives need to be told they are loved every day. It reassures them that they're wanted and needed. It makes them feel secure and close to their husbands.

Some husbands think gentleness and tenderness are signs of weakness. Such men would never wash dishes or help with housework because they think it's unmanly. They would never apologize or admit they're wrong because they're afraid they would lose face. But they couldn't be more wrong!

A real man's masculinity is not threatened by helping his wife, admitting he's wrong, or apologizing for hurting her. A real man is sensitive, thoughtful, and caring. He considers his wife to be more important than himself. He tolerates his wife's foibles and does what he can to live with her in peace and harmony. This requires great character and capacity to love.

1 Peter 3:7 . . . You husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

This does not mean he should allow himself to be a doormat or be manipulated by his wife.

EXERCISING AUTHORITY

Husbands must not be afraid to assert their authority even though some wives will try to make them feel guilty for doing so. Our society has become so undisciplined and disoriented to authority that anytime a husband overrules his wife, people think he's being a tyrant.

It's true that husbands must take care not to be a bully. There are many who confuse **asserting authority** with **demanding obedience**. They are not the same thing at all. A husband not only has the right but the duty to assert his authority. In doing so, he is carrying out his responsibilities as leader of his family. Asserting his authority includes setting policy, giving commands, and granting or refusing requests. This does not make him a tyrant or a bully; it makes him a leader.

However, he must never treat his wife the same way he treats his children and demand her obedience. Wives are adults and should already know how to behave, so the husband is to be tolerant and give her time to correct herself when she misbehaves. He is her husband, not her daddy, and she is an adult, not a child. But parents should demand obedience from their children and not tolerate their bad behavior. Children need to be taught how to be humble, respectful, obedient, thoughtful, courteous, loving, gentle, kind, and patient. Learning these traits will enable the boys to become great leaders and the girls to become great wives and moms.

There is tremendous responsibility that accompanies the husband's authority. He is answerable to God for how he uses it. Woe to the fool who abuses his authority, throwing his weight around, intimidating and abusing his family. The Lord will surely strike that man down and bring him to naught.

Heb. 10:31 . . . It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The husband is to protect and provide for his family. Everything he does is to be done in love. All of his policies, commands, and decisions are to come from his unconditional and sacrificial love for them.

The husband should encourage and compliment his wife, not suppress her. A wife will **respond** to her husband's love and praise but **react** to his tyranny. Any effort by the husband to limit or destroy his wife's volition will make it harder for her to submit and easier for her to become resentful. The more freedom she has to exercise her free will, the greater her motivation will be to please him.

However, there is a longstanding principle that must not be forgotten. If the husband doesn't **assert his authority**, he'll lose it. It's normal for a wife to push to see where the boundaries are, and if her husband doesn't draw the line, she will try to take over. So, husbands must be firm from time to time, set limits, make command decisions, and give instructions, but always in a loving manner, never in anger.

WHAT IF SHE DOESN'T OBEY?

The husband is not responsible for his wife's disobedience even though she may blame her defiance on him. (See the "No Excuses" chapter). He cannot make her obey nor is he required to. She is responsible to God for her obedience or disobedience. However, he cannot allow his decisions to be disregarded. Disrespect and defiance are not to be tolerated. If there are no consequences for rejecting his authority, she will lose respect for him and try to take over. As head of the house, he is authorized to carry out his policies and enforce the rules whether she agrees with them or not, or obeys them or not,

Example: A couple is struggling with finances and the husband is the only one employed, so he tells his wife to ask him before she buys something that costs more than \$100. If she consistently ignores him and makes purchases exceeding that amount, then he needs to point this out to her. If she tells him he is unreasonable or keeps on ignoring him and buys whatever she wants, she is directly defying his authority.

While the husband is not required to tolerate this, he is not allowed to get angry, raise his voice, call her names, or threaten her. He is to remain calm and objective. As head of the house, he is fully authorized to change the way the finances are managed. He can close joint checking accounts, cancel credit cards, open a new checking account in his name only, or go on a cash only basis. He should inform her of the new method of handling finances and how he now expects her to ask him for money to make specific purchases. This new policy will remain in force until he can trust her to follow the rules.

She may throw a fit, call him names, or threaten to leave. But he must remain calm and recognize that he is not responsible for her tirade. He should let her know he isn't acting out of spite but from his duty to be the leader God called him to be. If she decides to leave, he should let her go and trust the Lord to handle the situation. She automatically falls under God's discipline for disobeying her husband.

He should also inform her that if she leaves, she is leaving his provision and protection, and she will be on her own. He should also tell her he still loves her and she is welcome back as soon as she is willing to acknowledge that she is answerable to him under God. He should be firm and at the same time loving. His actions must not be motivated by vindictiveness, arrogance, or selfishness but emanate from his love and devotion to her and the Lord.

Some may think this is too drastic. Well, it often takes drastic measures to set something right that has been wrong for a long time. This is not suggesting that violent or abrasive behavior be condoned.

Sometimes a husband may feel threatened when his wife refuses to submit and be tempted to force her into submission by shouting, calling her names, or by threatening her. Such attempts to bully her or frighten her into compliance are foolish and totally unnecessary. He is not accountable for her disobedience, so why should he try to force her to obey? God put husbands in charge and their decisions are final.

So the husband cannot afford to be impulsive, to act without thinking or to lose his temper. He should use common sense, pray, and seek wisdom that comes from the Word of God before he acts, and if necessary, advice from his pastor.

If the wife doesn't agree and refuses to submit, it doesn't change a thing. Her husband is still in charge. He doesn't have to compete with her to determine who's going to be the boss. Husbands who understand this are not intimidated by their wife's disobedience or manipulation and are less apt to react or become hostile.

Marriage can become a battleground for couples who don't understand this. They can get so fed up with it all that they just want out. But God doesn't allow a wife or husband to break their marriage covenant when things get off kilter. The solution is not to bail out but to put things back in order, and God holds the husband responsible to do this.

MANIPULATION

It's natural for people to want to have their own way and this is certainly true of wives. The husband must be aware of this and be careful not to allow his wife to ignore his decisions and policies through the use of various techniques of manipulation. Husbands need to be aware of how wives can go undercover to get what they want instead of resorting to open defiance. They have a full bag of tricks, schemes, and machinations to fulfill their insatiable desire to get what they want. Husbands should be sensitive to their wives' wants and needs but indifferent to their efforts to manipulate.

ANGER is the weapon of choice most often used by the wife to manipulate her husband. If she knows she can get her way by throwing a fit, she will do it. Once the husband starts caving in to his wife to keep her from raising hell, he's had it. He doesn't realize how their roles have been reversed by his misguided efforts to keep the peace. If he makes a habit of caving in to avoid trouble, she will take charge and he will be the one submitting!

This is disastrous because it's contrary to God's design. Look what happened when Eve took the leadership role from Adam, ate the forbidden fruit, and then held it out for him to eat also. He disobeyed God when he followed her lead and ate it. The once perfect earth was cursed as a result of going against God's perfect plan, **Gen. 3:17**, and both of them were forced out of the beautiful Garden of Eden into a world of thorns, thistles, toil, and trouble.

Many a husband has sacrificed his marriage on the altar of keeping the peace. The diluted husband avoids confrontation, thinking his wife will love and appreciate him for giving her what she wants, but she doesn't. She resents him for being such a mouse. He receives nothing but scorn because she knows she can run over him and he'll take it. He actually becomes frightened of his wife; she knows it and he knows it even though neither would admit it.

All love is built on respect. A woman cannot love a man she doesn't respect and she can't respect a man she can manipulate. Remember that, gentlemen, the next time you are tempted to submit to your wife's demands in order to keep the peace. Here are a few other techniques wives use that are often successful:

THE SILENT TREATMENT: This is the way a wife tries to punish her husband. It includes ignoring him, refusing to talk or even acknowledge him. The idea is to make him so miserable, he will come around to her way of thinking. However, she should be doing just

the opposite, taking every opportunity to talk things over with him. Avoiding each other doesn't help because the only way for issues to be resolved is by talking about them. No communication, no solution.

WITHHOLDING SEX: This can be used as a leverage to get what the wife wants and is not only selfish, but is disobedience to a direct command from God. However, it is normal when a husband and wife are mad at each other that they don't feel like being intimate. One reason they should strive to reconcile as soon as possible is so their love life will get back on track.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 . . . *Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

CRYING: This is normal when people experience pain, are sad, and even when they're happy.

Ecclesiaste 3:4 . . . [There's a] *time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance . . .*

However, using tears in order to manipulate someone is a sin. Using the husband's sympathy to get what the wife wants is despicable. Crying because her marriage is coming apart is understandable, but crying because she is full of self-pity or in order to get her way is just plain ol' wrong.

THREATENING TO LEAVE: This technique is usually used after all the others have failed. It is the ultimate in defiance and disobedience. A wife who's willing to break her vows to God and her husband in order to get what she wants is truly childish. There are legitimate reasons for a wife to leave (*see Exceptions to Rule #2*), but breaking the marriage contract just to get her way is certainly not one of them.

These are just a few of the unbiblical and shameful schemes used by selfish, self-centered women to manipulate others to get their way. These are dangerous games to play that can eventually destroy the marriage if the husband doesn't understand what's going on.

A wife who knows she cannot manipulate her husband has a sense of security. She respects him and is thankful for his strength and confident leadership. She is proud of him because he's not afraid of her or anyone else who would try to usurp his authority.

Manipulation is an effort to impose your will over someone else. The husband cannot force his wife to obey, but if he leads in love, it makes it easier for her to submit. Nor can the wife demand love from her husband, but it is more likely that he will love her if she willingly and wholeheartedly submits to him.

RULE #2: WIVES, OBEY YOUR HUSBANDS

Ephesians 5:22-24 . . . Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

Ephesians 5:33 . . . Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband.

Colossians 3:18 . . . Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

1 Peter 3:1 . . . In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands

1 Peter 3:5-6 . . . For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. ⁶ Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right . . .

Contrary to the popular opinion, marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. God put the husband in charge. He is the head of the house and the king of the castle. This does not mean that he's allowed to be a bully, a tyrant, or a dictator. It means God has given him authority over his wife and family and holds him responsible for their welfare.

A daughter bears the family name of her father because he has authority over her and is responsible to provide for her and protect her. The mother has authority over her daughter too, but not to the degree that the father has. When she marries, his authority and responsibility is transferred to her husband whose family name she will bear and to whom she must submit.

The traditional wedding ceremony symbolizes this transfer. The father walks his daughter down the aisle and is asked, "Who gives this woman to be wed?" He answers, "I do". Why doesn't both the father and the mother walk her down the aisle and answer "we do" when asked that question? Because it's a matter of authority. Only the father has the leadership authority to give her away. The transfer officially takes place when he places his daughter's hand in the groom's hand.

It is helpful when everyone knows what their responsibilities are and what is expected of them. It is the husband's job to make sure his wife understands what he expects of her and what she can expect from him. It's not about a husband oppressing his wife, demanding more from her and less from himself. It's about God putting the husband in charge of the household and holding him responsible to manage it the way He designed it to be managed.

OBEDIENCE

It is impossible to defy God and be happy. Wives who take on the role of the boss, make the decisions, and have the final word, may get their way but they aren't really happy. The problem is that you can't have authority without responsibility. God designed the man, not the woman, to handle the pressure that comes with being the head of the house.

A dominating wife is under a curse. She has a strong drive to dominate her husband but at the same time, she resents him for allowing her to shoulder the responsibility that is rightfully his. She wants to rule the roost but avoid the headaches. She can't do it and blames her husband when things go wrong.

Even so, some think there are families that would be better off if the wives were leading them. They're wrong. It's contrary to God's perfect design. Wives who rule the roost don't respect their husbands. They resent them and that resentment turns into bitterness that overflows and poisons the whole family.

God created the woman to support and help her husband, not to compete with him to be in charge.

Genesis 2:18 . . . Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [helpmeet] suitable for him."

1 Corinthians 11:8-9 . . . For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 9) for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

This does not mean a wife is subservient to her husband.

1 Corinthians 11:11-12 . . . However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12) For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

1 Peter 3:7 . . . You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way . . . and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.

There is a difference between being **submissive** and being **subservient**. **Submission** to authority does not make anyone inferior in any way. Everyone has to answer to someone. However, to be **subservient** suggests that one is of lesser importance or inferior. The husband is not superior to the wife. The fact that God has assigned the husband a different role than the wife does not mean she is inferior to him. Great leaders depend on great followers for support and encouragement. Both are equally important.

A wife who refuses to submit to her husband's authority faces definite consequences. There will be disharmony between her and her husband and she must face whatever action he takes to implement his decision. If her husband fails to act, God certainly will. She is sure to fall under His discipline and it may be swift and severe.

NO EXCUSES

Of course, there will be times when the wife doesn't feel like obeying her husband, but what she feels like doing doesn't matter. She is required to obey her husband because God commands her to. She is to treat him with respect and submit to him, not because he deserves it, but because God requires it.

A wife may think she has the right to disrespect her husband if he disrespects her. WRONG ! She might think she doesn't have to obey him when she disagrees with him. WRONG ! Remember, **Eph. 5:24 . . . But as the church is subject to Christ, wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.**

So many wives say, "Yeah, but you don't know my husband!" It doesn't matter who your husband is. There are no "Yeah, but's". God does not allow wives to make their submission conditional. Yet many wives feel justified in defying their husbands' authority

because of his faults and weaknesses. The problem is, God does not give them permission to do that. They may excuse their own defiance but God does not.

A wife must understand that submission to her husband is based on her obedience to God. It's not about whether her husband deserves respect. She doesn't submit to him because he deserves it but because God requires it. She cannot defy her husband's authority without defying God. If her husband is out of line and she submits to him anyway because of her allegiance to God, she is blessed and her husband is disciplined. Once she understands this principle, it becomes easier for her to fulfill her proper role as his helpmeet.

The desire for wives to rule over their husbands goes all the way back to the first man and woman. Eve defied God when she ate of the forbidden fruit. She didn't want to be a helpmeet to Adam, **Gen. 2:18**, she wanted to be in charge. She believed the serpent's lie that she could become a god and be free of all authority. God condemned her for disobeying and declared that her husband would continue to rule over her.

Genesis 3:16 . . . To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be to [rule over] your husband, yet he shall rule over you."

God recognized that the natural inclination of wives would be to try to rule over their husbands, but God clearly does not permit it.

It's sad that so many wives are so strong-willed and determined to have their way that they refuse to submit. They want to be the leader instead of the follower. When their husband tries to exercise his authority, they give him hell until he caves in. They want to be in control so much that they're willing to destroy their own family and seek divorce rather than obey their husband.

EXCEPTIONS TO RULE #2

God has given husbands authority over their wives but it is not unlimited authority. No husband has the right to use violently abuse his wife, and if he oversteps the authority God gave him, and smacks her around, she absolutely and emphatically does not have to submit to that. She not only has the right but the obligation to leave him if she or her children are in danger of being harmed. A husband that physically abuses his wife is not a man. He is a miserable wretch who deserves to be locked up.

What about verbal abuse? If a husband loses control and starts yelling or shouting at his wife, she is free to turn away from him and walk away. She is not required to subject herself to his ranting and railings. However, she should be ready to talk to him when he cools off and is ready to discuss the matter calmly.

Wives can also be guilty of verbal abuse. If a wife starts screaming at her husband, he should turn from her and walk away and wait until she calms down before addressing the issue again. Marriages need less drama and more communication. This is covered in a chapter coming up called "Conflict Resolution".

No husband has the right to command his wife to do anything immoral or illegal. If he does, she is free to disobey. No husband's authority supersedes God's authority. The husband does not have the right to forbid his wife to go to church, to study her Bible, or to pray.

RULE #3: FORGIVE EACH OTHER

Ephesians 4:31-32 . . . Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

This verse is directed towards all believers, but it goes double for those who are married. There has never been a husband or wife who didn't need a lot of forgiveness. Implacability destroys marriages. Holding a grudge is like trying to sail a boat with the anchor dragging. Let the past go and build on the future.

Every time someone dredges up the past and holds it over their spouse, they kill any motivation in them to try to do better. Why should they try to improve? The first time they slip up a little bit, the past will be pulled out and used to bludgeon them over the head. And using the past to blame a failing marriage is nothing more than an excuse for not putting forth any effort to save it. Why bring up ugliness from the past? You can't change it. But you can always change the future. Don't allow old ghosts from the past to haunt your marriage. Forget them, leave them behind, and move on. (See point # 2 under Conflict Resolution on this.)

Many times the problem is not a lack of forgiveness but a lack of seeking forgiveness. Both the husband and wife are so busy blaming each other that they never see their own need to be forgiven. If people were as zealous to recognize their need for forgiveness as they are to blame the other person, most of their marital problems would disappear.

Don't underestimate the power of humility and forgiveness. When people humbly acknowledge wrong-doing, apologize, and their spouse forgives them, the divorce lawyers gnash their teeth because they won't be making any money off that couple.

MINE FIELDS

Some things are like land mines, hidden and very dangerous. Everything seems fine until you step on one.

CHILDREN

Psalm 127:3 . . . Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward.

This is certainly true, but children can also destroy a marriage. Few people are rearing their children properly these days, an issue that will not be discussed here. The book "Rearing Children" addresses this issue and can be found on our website, www.countrybiblechurch.us.

Undisciplined, disobedient children can tear a marriage apart. Husbands and wives should be in agreement as to how to rear their children. If one or both people already have children before they get married, they should make sure they agree on how they will train and discipline them. If they aren't in agreement, they should not get married!

Parents should not argue about rearing children in front of the kids. Those issues should be discussed in private. Don't side with a child against the other parent in the presence of the child. Again, resolve the issue in private and then go to the child together as a united front. This way, they won't be able to play one parent against the other in order to get what they want.

Children are important but some people are obsessed with them. You may have heard a parent say, "I live for my children." Don't buy into that idea. We are to live for God and we are never to put our children before Him or our spouse. Parents who live for their children neglect their spouse, this causes disharmony in the home, and negatively affects the children.

There is an old saying, "Children should be seen and not heard." This means children should be taught to respect elders. It is the duty of both parents to consistently train and discipline their children to display good manners, courtesy, and respect for other people as well as their property. This can be a monumental task but is a very necessary and rewarding one.

STEP PARENTS

Children often conspire against stepparents for no other reason than they are not their "real parent". Balderdash! Stepparents should strive to bond with their stepchildren but never tolerate their disrespect. They must have complete freedom to command and discipline their children. Parents need to teach their children to obey their stepparent because if they don't, they will suffer swift and severe punishment.

Children can be jealous of the stepparent and try to drive a wedge between them and their mom or dad if this problem is not nipped in the bud. Some adult children can be so focused on their future inheritance that they purposely reject their stepparent and try to cause trouble. The parents have the right to tell their kids to butt out or buzz off if they don't stop interfering.

IN-LAWS

In-laws can be a terrific blessing. Generally, they are eager to help, and you can usually benefit from their wisdom. We are to honor them as our parents and take care of them when they can no longer take care of themselves.

The problem is that in-laws can become out-laws and cause tension and discord when they interfere in their children's marriage. It's hard for some parents to let go. They meddle in the couple's private affairs and continue to tell them what to do. Some become jealous of their son-in-law or daughter-in-law and compete with them for attention and affection. Others have the idea that no one is good enough for their son or daughter and continually run down the spouse. The Lord knew this would be a problem so He gave the following directive:

Genesis 2:24 . . . For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

The authority parents have over their children ends when they marry. Of course, if the married children find it necessary to live under the roof of their parents, they must abide by the rules that are in effect in that household. It's best if the couple starts out with their own place from the very beginning.

The trouble usually starts when an in-law is not very fond of the son or daughter-in law. They constantly point out their weaknesses and imply that their son or daughter could have married somebody much better. Shame on them. This does not help. On the contrary, it can drive a wedge between the couple. The in-laws may have good intentions but that does not mitigate the harm they can do.

If you make it a point to compliment and praise your spouse when talking to your parents, it makes it harder for them to run down your spouse. However, if the criticism and attacks persist, the parent should be told that their concern is appreciated but no further attacks or denunciations will be tolerated. This must be done in a firm yet loving way, making sure the son or daughter isn't ugly or disrespectful. If this warning is not heeded, he/she may have to separate from their parent or parents in order to protect their marriage. If the parents acknowledge their wrong-doing and apologize, the child is to forgive them so that family harmony can be restored.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

All husbands and wives fight verbally. They disagree from time to time and it's easy for one, or both of them to lose control. Arrogance and stubbornness are usually the culprits, but many people simply don't know how to resolve disputes. Here are some "rules of engagement" :

1. DON'T AVOID DISPUTES

Avoiding disputes never resolves anything; it only postpones the inevitable. You may pretend everything is fine, keep the pain inside, and repress your anger, but sooner or later it will come out. The problem will not go away simply because you ignore it and refuse to deal with it. Issues are resolved by talking about them; that is why communication skills are so important.

Proverbs 27:6 . . . Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

A friend or spouse may be wounded when you let them know they have done something to hurt your relationship. You must be very careful how you approach them so they won't think you're judging or condemning them. Your purpose is to restore the relationship by being honest and forthright with them about a problem. Pretending nothing is wrong is deceitful and cheapens the relationship

2. TIME IT RIGHT

Before you initiate a discussion about something that may be sensitive:

- a. Make sure the time is right. If your spouse is tired, irritable, or not feeling well, put off the discussion for a better time.

- b. Don't bring up problems if either one of you is in a hurry, late for some engagement, or on the way to a social gathering. You need time to discuss the problem fully and to allow time for the emotions to cool down if necessary.
- c. It's best to talk things over when your spouse is not busy or preoccupied with something that would keep them from giving you their full attention.
- d. It's best not to talk about controversial things right before it's time to go to bed. If the issue is not resolved, it may be hard to go to sleep. And maybe after a good night's sleep, the problem won't seem so big after all. However, if you know you won't be able to sleep, go ahead, bring it up, and work to help get it resolved as quickly as possible.

3. ATTACK THE PROBLEM, NOT EACH OTHER!

Make sure you are in the right frame of mind before you discuss touchy issues. First pray and then think of the best way to bring up the issue without putting your spouse on the defensive. In other words, think before you speak. Be positive and remember, **how** you say something is as important as **what** you say.

4. FORGET ABOUT WHO'S TO BLAME

Blaming your spouse for causing some problem is the best way of starting a fight. It can develop into a feud over who's to blame and exacerbate the conflict rather than resolve it. Your focus on what your spouse has done wrong will only make things worse. You must come to realize that healing cannot begin until your focus changes to, "What can **I** do to make things better?"

Ephesians 4:29 . . . "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for the building up of others according to their needs that it may benefit those whose listen."

Proverbs 15:1-2 . . . A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. 2) The tongue of the wise uses knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness.

Proverbs 25:15 . . . By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, And a soft tongue breaks the bone.

Eph. 4:15 . . . speak the truth in love . . .

5. CONTROL YOUR ANGER

It is absolutely imperative that both parties control their emotions. When one loses control, it makes it very difficult for the other one to remain calm.

Proverbs 14:17 . . . A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.

Proverbs 14:29 . . . He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

Proverbs 15:18 . . . A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention.

Proverbs 16:32 . . . He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Proverbs 17:14 . . . The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

Ephesians 4:31 . . . Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice:

- a. There is no excuse for anger; it makes everything worse.

- b. If you recognize that you are losing your temper or the other person points it out, rather than denying it or justifying it, take a moment to cool down, collect your thoughts.
- c. Are you arrogant or are you humble? Check your attitude frequently. If there is any anger, arrogance, bitterness, impatience, or other sins, acknowledge them to God in a quick prayer and ask Him to help you to control your emotions. Then you can start talking again in a quieter tone.
- d. When things start heating up, it's best to take time to cool off. Take a 10 to 20 minute break. Stop talking and get away from one another for a little while.
- e. Just tell the other person you would like to a short break or ask if it could be discussed at another time.
- f. If the other person is so angry they refuse to back off or take a break, simply turn and walk away. Remember, it takes two to argue.

Proverbs 19:11 . . . A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

Proverbs 19:19 . . . A man of great anger shall bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.

Proverbs 25:28 . . . He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

Ephesians 4:26 . . . Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

When someone insults you and you insult them in return, they feel that their assault was justified. But you can neutralize their anger with kindness. When you refuse to react to their attack, remain calm, and respond in grace, it heaps burning coals on their head.

Proverbs 25:21-22 . . . If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

6. DON'T BRING UP THE PAST

Why bring up the past when you know that it won't help matters and it's just going to make your spouse angry? Making an issue over ancient history is immature and not relevant. DON'T DO IT!

- a. It is one of the most harmful things you can do. Your marriage has no chance of improving if either of you continues to bring up old issues.
- b. Rather than admitting that the issue is not a big deal and dropping it, the past is brought up in order to lord it over the other person.
- c. It sends a very negative message to your spouse:
 "You've failed in the past and I don't forgive you for it."
 "You're a loser and will always be a loser no matter how hard you try to change."
- d. It's an unfair technique used to win an argument. When one doesn't have enough facts to support his position, he dredges up old garbage from the past to make his case. It's an admission that his position can't be supported by existing facts.

7. LISTEN TO YOUR SPOUSE

James 1:19 . . . Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

- a. When trying to resolve conflict, we often tend to fall into one of these traps:
 - 1) Planning our response while our spouse is still talking
 - 2) Selectively hearing only what sounds right to us
 - 3) Coming into the conversation with our minds already made up
- b. Most people are more concerned about justifying themselves and placing blame on the other person than they are about resolving the dispute. They don't listen with the intent to find a solution; they only hear the things that they can use to discredit the other person.
- c. You need to shut your mouth and open your ears. Make sure you understand what your spouse is saying so you don't jump to false conclusions.
- d. Don't hesitate to ask them to clarify something you don't completely understand. Sometimes it's helpful to repeat what they said in your own words to make sure you understood them correctly.

8. BE OPEN

The freedom to share your innermost thoughts, feelings, concerns, and aspirations without fear of being put down or being embarrassed is important. Before differences can be resolved, both spouses should be willing to trust each other enough to open up to one another. It's difficult for some people to divulge their personal feelings, ideas, and opinions, but they should be encouraged to do so. When one spouse opens up, the other one feels loved and trusted. Communicating privately, confidentially, and intimately brings couples closer together.

9. BE CONSIDERATE

It is important to be considerate of the other person's position whether you agree with it or not. Your spouse will be less apt to clam up or be on their defensive if you are at least open to hear what they say without putting them down. They have a right to their opinion. And trying to make them feel stupid for not seeing things your way never helps.

10. FORGIVE

This is essential. No marriage can survive without it.

Colossians 3:12-14 . . . put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14) And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

When disputes arise, it's easy to say something hurtful and then regret it later. It's imperative for couples to be quick to forgive one another. There is no room for implacability or holding grudges. Once an apology has been made, the incident should be dropped.

11. COMPROMISE, YES! APPEASEMENT, NO!

Resolving disputes does not have to be an "I win and you lose" proposition. Usually there is room for compromise on both sides. A husband has to be particularly aware of this. If he has a domineering attitude and expects his wife to make all the concessions, the relationship is out of balance and will suffer.

However, there are times when it's the wife who is the bully. She may have no interest in compromising with her husband nor hesitate to use direct pressure of some sort to

get her way. Appeasing her might avoid a confrontation but it won't help matters. He should discuss the matter with her and be willing to compromise, but only if it doesn't require that he sacrifice his principles or go against what he thinks is best. Appeasing her to keep the peace is a big mistake.

The goal is to resolve the problem, not place blame, not try to prove that you're right, or try to get your way. Hopefully, this chapter on Conflict Resolution will help keep your disagreements from escalating into fights. But since all husbands and wives have verbal fights from time to time, it's important to know how to fight fairly. Here are the Rules of Engagement:

FAIR FIGHTING RULES:

1. No hitting, pushing, scratching, biting, or spitting
2. No name-calling, screaming or yelling
3. Don't interrupt! Listen to what the other one is saying.
4. Do not bring up the past! Deal with the issue at hand.
5. Do not use phrases like, "You always. . ." or "You never. . ."
6. Fight in private. Do not get others involved.
7. State what you want, not what you don't like.
8. Call a temporary time-out to cool off if necessary.
9. Having the last word and stomping off is not allowed. However, if the other person has lost control and is in your face, it's OK to turn and walk away.
10. Come to a conclusion, compromise, agree to disagree, or if necessary, set another time to discuss it, but don't let it go on and on.

NOTE: These rules are intended to keep the lines of communication flowing when there are disagreements. The fight is not about who will win the argument because it shouldn't be an "I win, you lose" situation. It's about finding the best way to resolve the matter. The husband's decision in the matter is final! Once his decision is made, it's over! No more discussion, no arguing, and no pouting. The Lord will hold him responsible for the decision he makes and hold the wife responsible to abide by it.

MYTHS

- MYTH 1: If I could only get him/her to change, all will be well. (already covered)
- MYTH 2: Proving that my husband/wife is more at fault than I will motivate them to be a better spouse. (already covered)
- MYTH 3: People who are different can't get along. Nonsense. Compatibility is important but we are all different. It's understanding the role God designed for you, and learning biblical principles and communication skills that enable people to get along with one another.
- MYTH 4: Couples who have disagreements have bad marriages that are unstable. Not so, all marriages have disagreements. Having disagreements doesn't mean you have a bad marriage. It's how you handle the disagreements that determines the stability of your marriage.
- MYTH 5: Conflicts and disagreements are the same. Not so, disagreements can lead to conflict, but they don't have to. If a couple disagrees about something and they agree to disagree, there's no problem and no conflict.

However, conflict can occur when:

- * A couple strongly disagree on something and stubbornly push to get their way.
- * Conflict can occur when the husband/wife stops thinking and starts emoting. That's when principles and skills go out the window and raw emotions take over.
- * Conflict can occur when the husband refuses to compromise with his wife. He should always listen to her because she may have an excellent idea. She may be right and he may be wrong. There are times he can and should be flexible and willing to alter his position. But there are also times when he should remain firm and not compromise.
- * Conflict can occur when the wife refuses to submit.

SEPARATION

Things may have gotten so bad between you and your spouse that you have separated from them physically or mentally. You may not be speaking to one another and want to have as little to do with each other as possible. Here are a few suggestions to help get you reconnected.

1. Tell you spouse you've read this book, you recognize that there are changes you need to make in your life, and this book has given you hope things will get better.
2. Ask them to read this book. If they are not willing to do so, then they probably have given up and no longer desire to make even the slightest effort to stay married. They may have become bitter and have developed an entrenched anger or vindictiveness. You are not responsible for their negativity, but you should implement the changes that are necessary in your own life anyway.
3. If they are willing to read it, great! Now you have something to talk about that is positive, encouraging, and can inspire hope. However the danger at this point is to fall back into old wheel ruts of negativity and start blaming and accusing each other again. So neither of you are permitted to say anything negative about the other person or about your relationship.

4. If there are things they don't agree with in this book, that's OK; they are entitled to their opinion and getting into an argument over it isn't worth it. Just continue to pray for them and keep on making changes in your own life and see what happens.
5. Don't allow yourself to think there is no hope. The solution process has begun even if you are the only one changing your behavior. Don't listen to anyone who is negative. It's true it takes two people working together to make a good marriage, but there's always the chance that changes they see in you will inspire them to make changes, too.
6. Don't expect miracles and don't try to go too far too fast. If you set your goals too high, you are setting yourself up for disappointment and you'll become discouraged. It takes time to turn a relationship around, and there will certainly be mistakes made and temporary lapses back into the old ways.
7. Read this book over and over and let the principles sink in. Make a large copy of the "Fair Fighting Rules" and place them in full view to be a reminder for you both.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the final analysis, marriage problems are spiritual problems. If people would simply obey God, there would be no problem. He made it exceedingly simple by putting the husband in charge, requiring him to lead in love and his wife to respect his authority

Arrogance and ignorance always make things worse! Pride takes something simple and makes it difficult. People don't defy God because they can't understand Him, but because they don't care who He is or what He wants. They only care about what they want. They're not humble or objective and will not take responsibility for their bad behavior or rebellion against Him. They don't trust Him enough to even try to do things His way.

If you continue to excuse yourself and accuse your spouse, your marriage is doomed. What you've been doing hasn't worked, so why not give God's plan a chance? Ask Him for help. You'll never regret it.

Proverbs 3:5-6 . . . Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶⁾ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Psalms 37:4-5 . . . Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵⁾ Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it.

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