

BIBLE STUDY – LESSON 12

SUBJECT: SOLVING MARRIAGE CONFLICT - A BIBLE PLAN TO RESOLVE FAMILY STRIFE AND ALIENATION

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Strife, conflict, and alienation trouble many modern marriages. Quarreling and even violence and abuse may lead to bitterness and divorce. God invented marriage, so His word reveals how best to conduct it and how to resolve marital problems. God's word does not guarantee marital bliss, but it does give guidance and counsel to help couples with serious problems.

Introduction:

Every family has disagreements.

The couple that never has conflicts does not exist. Unfortunately, conflict can lead to bad fights. *A bad fight is one that seriously alienates husband and wife but never resolves the cause of the problem.* As a result couples build up bitterness, quarreling, uncontrolled anger, hatred, and often divorce, violence, and abuse.

What many couples lack is the *skill* to discuss disagreements and *resolve* them. Specifically, they need the ability to discuss serious problems, reach a plan to resolve them, and then put that plan into action. I emphasize that this is a *skill* that many people simply never have learned, but which *can be learned*.

The purpose of this study is to learn what the Bible says about how to resolve conflict in marriage.

We are concerned with conflict, strife, and alienation in general, but especially with *serious* conflicts that destroy the relationship of husband and wife and that may lead to divorce.

Consider the following Bible counsel that can help couples avoid or resolve such serious problems.

I. HAVE FAITH

Many couples have bickered and quarreled so long that they lose hope things will ever improve. They resign themselves to go on quarreling and hating the rest of their lives, or they end the marriage by divorce.

Couples need to believe that, by God's power, they CAN resolve their marriage problems if both parties will really work at it.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. If we trust in ourselves we may fail. But we must believe that Jesus will provide the strength we need to please to God.

Careful thought will convince us that serious marriage conflict is not God's will for us. God created marriage for the *good* of man and woman. He never intended for marriage to be a source of hatred and bitter grudges.

Hatred, bitter quarreling, and alienation in our homes mean that someone is disobeying God.

Either the problem began because someone disobeyed God, or else the original problem led someone to commit other sinful acts. In either case, *serious marriage problems almost always involve sin.*

If so, then we can overcome the problems by the same methods the Bible describes for overcoming other sins! *Recognizing that sin is the root of the problem gives hope, because a Christian knows that God has the solution to sin.*

However, marriage involves *two* people. A problem between two people can only be completely removed if *both* parties are willing to work at it. If only one person obeys God, the other person can keep the problem alive.

However, if your partner will not work to improve the marriage, this does not remove your responsibility to do what you can.

To please God, you must follow His will regardless of what your partner does. You must believe that *you* can please God regardless of how others act.

1 John 5:4 - If we are born of God, we overcome the world through *faith*. This includes overcoming improper family relations, but we must *believe* that it can be done by the power of God.

If both parties commit themselves to practice God's plan, any couple can eliminate sin from their marriage. And regardless of whether or not your partner obeys God, you can still please God if *you* will follow the steps we are about to describe.

[1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 9:8; Josh. 1:5-9; Eph. 3:20,21]

II. PRAY FOR GOD'S STRENGTH.

Philippians 4:6,7 - Don't be anxious, but by prayer and supplication make your requests known to God. Christians should do this for all our problems, but specifically for our marriage problems. If we have proper *faith* in God's power, then we will pray diligently about our marriage problems.

1 John 5:14 - Be confident that, if we ask according to His will, He hears us. [Matt. 6:13; 1 Pet. 5:7]

When we have marriage problems, especially serious ones, we need to believe that God will answer prayer. If both the husband and wife are faithful Christians then they should spend much time together and individually praying for God's help with their problems.

Remember, however, that God answers according to His will. If your companion is not a Christian or is not faithful, then God will not *force* them to do right. He may, however, give them an opportunity to learn His will for their lives.

When your family faces serious problems, how much do you pray to God together and trust His power to answer your prayers?

D. Love Requires Giving & Self-sacrifice.

Giving of self is the essence of love.

John 3:16 - God so loved the world that He *gave* His only-begotten Son.

Ephesians 5:25 - Jesus loved the church and *gave* Himself for it.

1 John 3:14-18 - If you see your brother in need and don't *give* what is needed, you don't have love.

Romans 12:20 - Loving you enemy requires *giving* food and drink when needed.

A basic requirement in solving family disagreements is a willingness to give of ourselves for the good of others.

Typically each spouse refuses to change because he/she is upset at something the other person did. If we would view the situation honestly and objectively (as if it were someone else's problem), we would admit we should do differently. But we refuse to change because of some habit or characteristic we dislike in our spouse.

The fundamental lesson of Christ's love is that we should give up our own desires for the good of others even when they are not acting the way we think they should. Don't say, "I'll change if

he/she will too." If an act is good for others, **do it** regardless of what they are doing. If we have been wrong, **admit it** regardless of whether or not they have admitted their errors.

Even if we are convinced we are not the root cause of a problem, we should ask ourselves honestly what we can do to help improve it. This does not mean ignoring sin. Jesus did not cause our sin problem and He did not compromise with sin, but He did sacrifice Himself to provide a solution to our sin problem. He did not just sit back and criticize us for our sin, but He became involved to provide a solution. He did not do everything for us, but He made sure we had a way whereby we could overcome the problem.

A spouse will often criticize: "It's his/her fault, so let him/her solve it." Even if that is true, is it helpful? Instead think, "What can I offer to do - how can I become involved - so as to help resolve this problem?" Instead of saying, "Why don't you do this?" say, "Why don't you and I work on this **together**?"

As long as neither spouse will take the first step to give up what they want, strife will continue. When one is willing to give in for the good of the group, then a start has been made to resolving the problem. When both are willing to give in for the good of the group, then the solution definitely will be found.

The husband has the final say, but he must not just do what he wants. He must put aside his own desires and do what is best for the group. The wife must not insist on what she wants, but must give in and submit to the husband's decisions.

[1 John 4:9,19; Acts 20:35; Luke 10:25-37]

VI. MAINTAIN AND EXPRESS COMMITMENT TO THE MARRIAGE.

A. Divorce and Separation Are Not Options.

Read Romans 7:2,3; Matthew 5:31,32; 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11 - Marriage is a lifetime commitment. One can Scripturally divorce a mate only if it is done because he/she has committed fornication. If we have unscripturally divorced, we must seek reconciliation with our spouse or remain unmarried. Remarriage is not an option.

Obviously one should never want his/her spouse to commit fornication, so it follows that each one must sincerely hope for the marriage to continue.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 - Since the sexual union is upright only within marriage (Heb. 13:4), the man and wife are to fulfill one another's desires for sexual affection. They are not to voluntarily separate except by mutual consent for a temporary time for spiritual purposes.

Sometimes troubled couples choose to separate. Separation not only causes sexual temptation, but it weakens commitment to the marriage and increases the likelihood of divorce. Doubts about one another's conduct and motives increase. Problems cannot be discussed and resolved.

Clearly the Bible requires both spouses to continually view the marriage with commitment.

B. Express Your Commitment to the Marriage.

Sometimes one will make statements that show lack of commitment to a marriage.

Some will say:

"I wish I never married you."

"I wish you were dead."

"I should have divorced you years ago."

"If this doesn't stop, I'll see a lawyer."

"I'm leaving, and I don't know if I'll be back."

In the absence of Scriptural grounds for divorce, all such statements are sinful, because they destroy the security and commitment of the marriage. They do not express love, but are used as a weapon to threaten and hurt the spouse.

Not only is it sinful to practice wrong, it is also sinful to DESIRE to practice wrong or to THREATEN to do wrong.

Proverbs 4:23 - Out of the heart are the issues of life. We sin because we allow ourselves to think and speak about our desire to sin. See also Matt. 5:21f,27f,33-37, etc.

Matthew 12:35-37 - The mouth speaks out to the abundance of the heart. We will be justified or condemned by our words.

In the absence of Scriptural grounds for divorce, Christians should never do anything that appears to justify or lead to separation or divorce. Instead, they should deliberately express and promote commitment. "I really do love you. I want to work out our problems, and I want us to have a good marriage."

VII. EXPRESS APPRECIATION & PRAISE FOR WHAT IS GOOD.

Philippians 4:6,7 - Let your requests be made known to God with *thanksgiving*. Even when we are concerned about our problems, we must remember to be thankful for our blessings.

Often in times of strife, we get so upset with our companion, that we fail to express appreciation for the good qualities they have. This tends to blow the problems out of proportion.

A. Husbands Should Express Appreciation for Their Wives.

Genesis 2:18 - It was not *good* for man to be alone, so God made woman to be a companion for him. A woman who fulfills her God-given role is *good* for a husband. She was created by God for that very purpose.

Proverbs 18:22 - He who finds a wife, finds a good thing and obtains favor of God. So let the husband *say* so.

Proverbs 12:4 - A worthy woman is the *crown* of her husband. If so, then let the husband express appreciation for her. [Prov. 19:14; 31:10]

1 Peter 3:7 - The husband should give *honor* to his wife. Yet many husbands give much more criticism than they give honor. How often do you deliberately say or do something intended to *honor* your wife? Is she supposed to consider herself honored simply because it has been a while since you *insulted* her?

Proverbs 31:28-31 - A worthy woman should be *praised* by her husband. Do you *praise* your wife when she prepares a meal, cleans the house, cares for your children, or fulfills her responsibilities as a Christian? Or do you just criticize when you think she fails?

A husband often gets a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment from his work. He gets a regular paycheck and perhaps occasional promotions. But the wife works day in and day out at home with the family. If the husband does not express appreciation, the wife should still find a sense of accomplishment in seeing her children develop and in knowing above all that God is pleased. But she has a much greater sense of security and being needed if her husband *tells* her he appreciates what she does.

God tells us to praise our wives when they do good. If we did, they would find it much easier to fulfill their role as submissive homemakers.

B. Wives Should Express Appreciation for Their Husbands.

Romans 13:7 - All Christians should give honor to whom honor is due. This is a general principle. It would teach husbands to honor their wives, but it would also teach wives to honor their husbands.

Ephesians 5:33 - Because the husband is the head of the wife (v22-24), she should respect (reverence) him. Surely this includes expressing appreciation for him.

Ladies, if your husband works regular hours at his job to provide for you and the family, how often do you tell him you appreciate it? Or do you just take his paycheck and spend it without a word of thanks? When he does a handyman job around the house for you, or spends time with the children, or fulfills his role as a Christian man, do you tell him you appreciate it?

Probably the greatest need that the wife has is a sense of *security* in knowing that she is loved and needed. Probably the greatest need the man has is the sense of *personal worth* in knowing that he is respected and looked up to. Both these needs are met if the husband and wife will express appreciation one another.

If you are angry and upset with your companion, do two things. (1) Make an honest list of every good quality your companion possesses and every good work he/she does. Be as thorough as you can. (2) Then every day make a definite point to express love to your companion and find some specific thing to compliment and express appreciation for. This will significantly help when it comes time to discuss your problems, and it will also make your problems seem much less serious.

C. Pray for Forgiveness.

Acts 8:22 - Peter told Simon to repent and pray for forgiveness. If we have sinned, we must confess, not just to our companion, but also to God.

1 John 1:9 - He is faithful to forgive us if we *confess* our sins.

When you have sinned, do you humbly confess it to God and to your spouse? [Matt. 6:12; Psa. 32:5]

D. Forgive One Another.

Luke 17:3,4 - When one has sinned against us and confesses, we must forgive, even seven times a day if necessary. Forgiveness is often needed in families. Love forgives as often as is needed.

Colossians 3:13 - We must forgive the way God forgives. How do we want God to forgive us? Do we want Him to say, "I've forgiven you enough already. I don't care how sorry you are or how hard you try, I won't forgive"? Do we want Him to say He forgives, but then keep bringing it up again and using it as a weapon against us?

Illustration: When Indian tribes made peace, they would symbolize it by burying a hatchet (tomahawk). The point was that everybody knew where it was, but nobody would go dig it up and use it to hurt the others. So forgiveness does not mean we are no longer aware the thing happened. It means we will not bring it up again to hurt the other person with it.

Proverbs 10:12 - Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins. How is your family? Do you love one another enough to admit your errors and then to really forgive like you want God to forgive you?

[Matt. 18:21-25; 6:12,14,15; 5:7]