

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

Volume 2 - Issue 1

Winter Edition

How can you resolve conflicts in a biblical way?

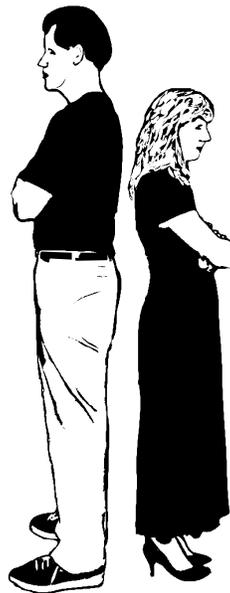
Is your marriage struggling with multiple conflicts that seem to never get resolved? Are you sick and tired of arguing about the same things over and over again? Are you wondering if there is a way to ever solve these problems? If you are, then this publication is exactly what you are looking for.

There is a way to resolve conflicts with your spouse. If there is anyone who knows how to solve marital problems it's the One who created marriage. The One who created you has revealed this plan in His Word. How do you do it? What is needed to resolve the conflicts in your marriage?

First, you must be willing to resolve the conflicts. The willingness to actually do something about the conflicts between you and your mate is the most important place to start. In marriage counseling, this is the first question I usually ask a couple: "Are you willing to do whatever the Bible requires to resolve this conflict?" The answer to this question reveals very quickly whether anything will be accomplished in our time together. Before you read this article, you must determine the same thing. Are you willing to resolve the conflicts between you and your spouse? Are you willing to take the Biblical steps that God requires of you?

With two willing hearts there is no problem that can't be solved. God promises in His Word that all He is

looking for is a willing heart to obey Him, and His blessings will flow out to you. He promised His people, "*If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land*" (Is. 1:19). Then He warned them, "*But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken*" (Is. 1:20). Notice the importance God has placed on this one attitude of the heart. Start here brothers and sisters. Ask God to give you a willing heart to resolve the conflicts. You may even have to start with asking God to give you a willingness to be made willing. He can do this too!



This is not the way to begin!

Second, you must be willing to ask God for help. Jesus said to His disciples, "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matt. 26:41). Even though

Jesus knew that His disciples had a willingness to follow Him, He also knew the weakness of their flesh. This is why He encouraged them to pray. He knew that only the power of the Holy Spirit could rule over the weakness of the flesh.

Do you realize how weak and insufficient you are in your own strength to do what God requires? If you do, ask Him now to empower you with His Spirit to help you to lovingly seek reconciliation with your mate. Where you are weak, He will make you strong (2 Cor. 12:9,10)!

If you are not a Christian or you have not been walking with Him, He still loves you and wants to help you turn your marriage around. Yet, you must have a personal relationship with Him to enlist His aid. You can't ask for His benefits and resources and have nothing to do with Him. You wouldn't want mere acquaintances to come and ask you for money and help if they weren't your friends, and the same is true of God. If you want God's help you have to be more than His acquaintance; you need a love relationship with Him. Then, He will give you His life inside your soul to enable you to do what He commands.

This change of relationship with Jesus also entails willingness. Jesus said of many in His day, "*But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life*" (John 5:40). Are you willing to come to Him, to turn from your life of independence to one of trusting Him? Are you willing to turn from your sin and rebellion to follow Him? He died to forgive you and longs to pardon you right now. Ask Him to come in and

She is your companion and your wife by covenant. Mal. 2:14

take over your heart and life. As you reconcile with Him, you will be able to reconcile with your spouse.

Third, you must be willing to please God. This is essential before you begin to try to take any practical action in the process of reconciliation. The desire to please God will instantly motivate you to action that you would never ordinarily take. When Paul the Apostle wrote to the Thessalonian church he urged them regarding how they *“ought to walk and to please God”* (1 Thess. 4:1). Notice, he associated their correct walk with the desire to please God.

With two willing hearts there is no problem that can't be solved.

This attitude is so important because the basic problem in every marriage is that desire to please self. Many conflicts are simply the result of selfishness, self-will, or self-righteousness. According to James, self is the root of every conflict and evil that occurs in any relationship, *“Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there”* (James 3:16). Therefore, to deal with your selfish desires you need a higher motivation, that of pleasing the Father.

When you choose to please God, you strike at the root of your problems. If you obey God's Word, you can't help but please Him in every way. With this attitude, a willing heart, and the power of the Holy Spirit, you are now ready to take these practical steps:

1. You must restrain your anger. This is a choice you must make with every conflict that occurs because explosive anger is the primary reason

that nothing gets resolved. Many have said to me, “Steve, I just can't control my temper.” Yet, this statement is in direct contradiction to what Scripture declares. When Paul was in prison for false charges made against him, he could have been very angry and depressed; but instead, he said, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Phil. 4:13). Controlling his emotions and his anger were undoubtedly some of the “all things” he refers to in this text. You can control your anger too, if you will ask God for His help. He has the strength you need to do what you find impossible. Solomon said, *“It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel”* (Prov. 20:3). Also, *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city”* (Prov. 16:32). Restraining your anger is one way to stop a quarrel from ever starting in the first place. Likewise, once an argument has started, you still have the choice to stop it. You must rule your own spirit instead of letting your spirit rule you. This takes greater spiritual might and strength than it does to take a city in war.

But how can you restrain your anger? Where do you get this greater might to control your spirit? By a choice to ask God for help and by your personal surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. You make the choice to please God by stopping the escalation of your anger. Take a five minute time out for prayer so you can calm down. Remember, it's not by your might or by your power, but by His Spirit (Zech. 4:6). Your anger is a powerful force, but His Spirit is even more powerful. Have you experienced His greater power? It's there for you.

2. You must listen instead of trying to only prove your point. This skill is only possible when your anger is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

When your mate tells you something

he or she is upset about, do you interrupt? Do you try to answer your loved one's concerns before he or she has even finished talking? Are you really listening, or merely thinking about how to answer? These are all signs that you aren't listening. If you aren't a good listener, you won't be a very good communicator because you haven't really understood what your spouse has said. If you constantly hear your mate declare, “No, that's not what I mean,” or, “You don't understand what I'm saying,” you probably don't! If you don't understand what your spouse is saying, how can you resolve anything?

You must be willing to please God.

The Scripture commands you to be *“swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (James 1:19). The more you listen, the slower you will speak. The slower you speak, the easier it will be to restrain your wrath and anger. Try it! The next argument you have, try listening and waiting until your spouse is completely finished, then respond. You'll be amazed at how your anger will be controlled.

3. You must confess your faults instead of blameshifting. When there is a conflict between you and your mate, first determine your part in the disagreement. Is it your attitude, your tone of voice, your actions, or your choice of words that started the conflict? You should confess these things sincerely before you ever discuss your mate's faults. Jesus said, *“Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?...Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brothers eye”* (Matt. 7:3,5).

Honesty is the fastest way to resolve any conflict. Why? Because when you first humbly acknowledge your faults, your spouse doesn't have to spend all that time trying to convince you what you've done wrong. Plus, it's hypocritical of you to blame your spouse for the whole problem when you can't even see your own faults. Notice the hypocrisy of Adam and Eve when they shifted the blame for their own sin. "*The woman you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.*" Eve also shifted the blame when she declared, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*" (Gen. 3:12,13). We can see blameshifting easily in others, why is it we can't see our own?

The more you listen, the slower you will speak.

Ask God to search your heart, right now, that you may first see your own faults. Then, as James says, "*Confess your trespasses to one another and pray one for another...*" (James 5:16), and you will be amazed at how easily you can resolve your marital conflicts.

4. Take action quickly. Jesus said, "*Agree with your adversary quickly...*" (Matt. 5:25). There are many reasons why this is an essential aspect in conflict resolution.

First, as time passes the facts get distorted. It isn't long before you can't remember who did or said what. Then the argument may shift to fighting over distorted facts. This solves nothing. The best time to solve a conflict is today!

Also, the longer you wait to resolve a conflict, the harder your heart can get. This is why the author of Hebrews said with urgency, "*Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the*

rebellion..." (Heb. 3:7,8). Paul also knew this tendency of man's heart to harden over time and commanded, "*Do not let the sun go down on your wrath...*" (Eph. 4:26). In other words, don't let even one day pass when anger is in your heart. Don't go to bed that way! Resentment and anger in your heart will only harden you more and more, and ultimately will hinder you from solving even the simplest problems.

Don't be the person who allows weeks, months, or even years to go by without resolving conflicts. You will always be the loser.

5. Ask forgiveness for your sin. To forgive is not an option; it is a command. Jesus said, "*Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses*" (Mark 11:25,26). This statement is all-inclusive; "anything against anyone" would include all that is happening with you and your spouse right now.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling; a choice to please and obey God. You will never feel like forgiving anyone. The feeling of forgiveness only comes after you choose to forgive. No one deserves to be forgiven anymore than you do. Therefore, "*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you*" (Eph. 4:32).

Make the choice right now! Choose to show mercy and forgive. Then ask God to forgive you for holding resentment against your mate. This will enable you to find the solutions you are looking for in your marriage.

6. Tell your partner with the proper attitude and motive what action or attitude has offended you. After you have taken the above steps, you may now state your case if your spouse has not already

confessed his or her own faults. This must be done with gentle words as opposed to harsh words. "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*" (Prov. 15:1).

The last thing you want to do at this point is to stir up more anger. Come with soft words of reconciliation as you discuss how your mate has offended you. There are always two sides to a conflict. Both sides must be dealt with completely.

The best time to solve a conflict is today!

When Jesus taught His disciples about resolving conflicts, He gave them a goal. He said, "*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother*" (Matt. 18:15). The goal is to gain your brother, and this means you must come with that attitude and desire. If you come with yelling, finger-pointing, and accusations, merely venting your own frustrations, the results will be far from profitable, and you won't gain a right relationship with your spouse.

7. Find agreement through compromise. The goal on the vertical plane is to please God; the goal on the horizontal plane is to find an agreement. Remember the command of Jesus we looked at earlier to "*agree with your adversary*" (Matt. 5:25)? Agreement is found as you choose to give in and compromise in areas in which you have been stubbornly selfish. This will please God and demonstrate love toward your mate.

The Prophet Amos asked the question, "*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*" (Amos

3:3). Amos was reproofing God's people for their disobedience and unwillingness to agree with God about their sin. The Apostle John believed the same. He said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins..." (1 John 1:9) The word "confess" means to "agree with." When you confess your sins, you are agreeing with God, and this enables you to walk with Him. God will never force His will upon you. He waits for you to come into agreement with Him.

The same thing is true with your spouse. When you both confess your faults, you find immediate agreement together. This agreement is what enables you to find a lasting compromise where you have previously demanded your own way. Compromise is loving agreement to give, not demand. Forcing and imposing your will, is nothing but pride and selfishness on your part. This will reconcile nothing between you!

8. Take action even if your spouse will not. This is what God did with you. He demonstrated "His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8) Christ took the action of love even when we were still in rebellion against Him. If we are to love others as He has loved us, then we must do the same (John 13:34).

When you take action to love and change what you're doing wrong, this brings powerful encouragement to provoke your spouse to love you and to change too (Heb. 10:24). Jesus said, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them..." (Matt. 7:12). Apply this principle to your marriage. How do you want your spouse to act toward you? Take this action toward him or her. Take this action today!

9. What should you do if your spouse doesn't respond? Be patient, pray, and don't give up! Some people take longer to respond

than others. This, again, is the posture that God has taken toward you. He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). So also, "you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36).

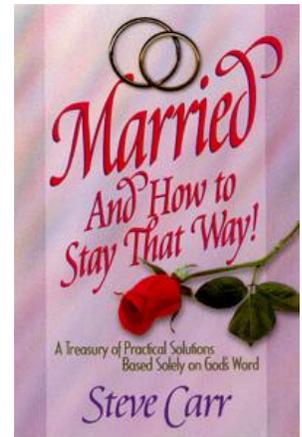
You must be patient because most heated arguments are not resolved by just one conversation. If you wait and pray and there is still no response after a short time, go again and ask your mate to consider the issues you have previously discussed. Continue to pray that God would cause your loved one to yield to the truth and take action. If your partner brings other issues to you in which you have been offending, follow the above steps again.

Remember God's love continually seeks reconciliation with man. His love in you will do the same! Seek reconciliation!

If you need further help in resolving any of these issues, don't wait; see your pastor as soon as possible.

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