

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE SESSION 4: *COMMON CHALLENGES TO UNITY*

Introduction

- A. There are as many threats to marital unity as there are types of sin. In both our relationship with the Lord and in our relationships with others we see that sin *repels* and grace *draws*.
- B. In this last session we will cover four of the most common areas in which marital conflict arises. The purpose of this session is to illustrate how the principles we have previously laid down are applied to these specific challenges.
- C. Each of these areas need to be more thoroughly studied than we will have time and space to cover here. But these cursory points will assist you in the practical pursuit of oneness in marriage.

I. Marital Unity in Communication

- A. The importance of communication to a godly marriage.
 - 1. Breakdown in communication is one of the most common areas of marital dysfunction. The other areas in marriage will suffer from a lack of biblical communication (cf., Session One on conflict resolution).
 - 2. God places importance on holy communication (Eph. 4:25, 29, 31).
 - 3. The tongue is directly tied to the heart. What is in the heart comes out the mouth, and thus the mouth is a window to the soul (Mt. 12:34; 15:18).
 - 4. Our speech is a test of our spirituality (Jas. 1:26).
- B. Prerequisites to godly communication.
 - 1. A desire to please Christ more than self or spouse (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:23).
 - 2. Growing humility. Pride is a primary root cause of breakdowns in communication (Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:1-4; Jas. 4:6-7; 1Pet. 5:5-9).
 - 3. A sense of accountability to the Lord for our words (Mt. 12:36).
 - 4. A commitment to taking the time to communicate (Rom. 12:10-12).
- C. Non-verbal communication.
 - 1. We can say volumes without uttering a word. For example, people regularly communicate the following non-verbally: love, happiness, fear, sadness, indifference, apathy, anger, physical attraction, irritation, discouragement, doubt, guilt, boredom, etc.
 - 2. Non-verbal communication includes: facial expressions, hand gestures, sighing, rolling the eyes, a look of amazement, a look of disgust, a wink, staring, smiles, frowns, a touch, a squeeze, giving a gift, listening attentively, notes, body posture, volume of voice, tone of voice, etc.
 - 3. Think of the various ways you can say, "Could you please come here?" (e.g., with anger, desperation, sadness, love, cheerfulness, apathy, etc.).
 - 4. Our actions also communicate. If you say that you want to spend some time with your spouse and you fiddle around on the computer all day, your actions will speak louder than your words. Keep your word and promises.
- D. The first part of verbal communication: *Listening*.

1. Commit to listening *first* – before speaking (Jas. 1:19). We could avoid problems half of the time if we would stop and concentrate on what our spouse is saying (Prov. 10:19).
 2. God says that jumping ahead to what we think our spouse is thinking before we hear what they say is utter folly (Prov. 18:13).
 3. Practical commitments and guidelines:
 - a. Concentrate on what they are saying.
 - b. Do not interrupt. Wait until they are finished before speaking.
 - c. Do not formulate your answer while the other person is talking.
 - d. Give each other time to process information and respond.
 - e. Ask questions to clarify.
 - f. Most important: do not assume that you understand until you can restate what your spouse has said *to their satisfaction*. This is a big help!
- E. The second part of verbal communication: *Speaking*.
1. Bridling the tongue comes with great difficulty (Jas. 3:2). Pray for help (Ps. 141:3).
 2. Failure to bridle the tongue creates great havoc and damage (Jas. 3:5b-6). Conversely, guarding the mouth saves you from trouble (Prov. 21:23). This means that if you can discipline your tongue, then much marital grief will be avoided.
 3. Be open and honest. Do not tell a partial truth or be evasive (Eph. 4:25). Be straight-forward in what you are saying (Mt. 5:37). See Session One on openness and trust. This has to be balanced with the next point (#4).
 4. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1). We need to know how to answer and how to ensure that our speech is gracious and seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6).
 5. Guard *how* you say what you say (Prov. 16:32; Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:29-32). This includes: sharp or harsh tone, outbursts, yelling, name-calling, belittling, which are better known as bitterness, anger, slander, malice, etc.
 6. You are not to respond in like kind if your spouse is sinning with their tongue (Prov. 26:4-5).
 7. Remember that the timing of what you say can have just as big of an impact as what you say. Ask yourself, “Is this the best time to say this?” But do not needlessly delay (Eph. 4:26-27). Think about what to say before you say it (Prov. 15:28).
 8. Some areas will be easier to talk about than others. Work on those areas that are most challenging. Examples include: spiritual walk, opinions, concerns, interests, emotions, goals, plans, expectations, finances, convictions, work, parenting, dreams, sex, friends, problems, failures, victories, current events, what you read, etc.
 9. There are two opposite errors: blow-up and clam-up. Not speaking is also a sin. If you tend to clam-up, then you need to work on getting what is on the inside to the outside in a godly spirit.
 10. We also need to be able to communicate reproof with a gentle spirit when needed (Gal. 6:1; Mt. 18:15ff; Prov. 25:12).

F. Cultivating spiritual conversation.

1. Just as we are to speak with our children all day about spiritual things (Deut. 6:6ff), so married couples should cultivate spiritual conversation (Mal. 3:16-18).
2. Spiritual-mindedness produces spiritual conversation (Rom. 8:5-6; Col. 3:1-4). What you think about most is what you will talk about most (Mt. 12:34; 15:18). Like an overflowing glass, if you continue to fill the mind with good things, it will eventually spill out the mouth.
4. We are to study one another so that we know how to best stir one another up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). Self-consciously plan and employ your mouth to build up your spouse and minister grace to them (Eph. 5:29; Col. 4:6).

G. Further practical suggestions.

1. Be willing to admit you are part of the problem (Prov. 20:6) and be willing to change (Mt. 5:23-26).
2. Avoid using emotionally charged words. Be responsible for your own emotions, words, and actions without blaming your sin on your spouse (Gal. 6:5; Jas. 1:13-15).
3. Do not have reruns of old arguments (Eph. 4:26).
4. Deal with the present, not the past (see Session One).
5. Learn to communicate non-verbally.
6. Apply your mind to understanding why your spouse is saying what they are saying. If they say, "You don't love me", what is behind that? This is a big part of growing to know your spouse.
7. Remember the golden rule (Mt. 7:12).
8. Always be more angry about your own sin than you are about your spouse's sin (Job 40:3-5; 42:6; Ezra 9:6).
9. Major on humbling yourself and admitting wrong. As noted above, pride is the primary culprit in communication breakdowns.
10. For more information, listen to Pastor McCurley's sermon series on the tongue at:
<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?keyword=greenvillefcc&keyworddesc=&currsection=sermonsource&SourceOnly=true&keywordwithin=tongue&x=0&y=0>

II. Marital Unity in Child-Rearing

A. It is likely that a significant portion of your life will be devoted to raising children. Young couples should not make the mistake of thinking that they have time before they need to think about this topic. It is better to have talked through how you will raise your children before they arrive. You must be unified in your perspective and plan.

B. Biblical view of covenant children.

1. Our children belong to the Lord (Gen. 17:7)
2. Our goal is to raise up a godly seed for the Lord (Mal. 2:15)

3. Children are intended to be a blessing and reward from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5).
4. Foolish, ungodly children are a curse to their parents (Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 19:13; 21:20).

C. Parenting is a temporary stewardship (Eph. 6:4). The husband/wife relationship is characterized by oneness (Gen. 2:24-25), and the parent/child relationship is one of fruitfulness (Ps. 127:3). The former is the first priority and the latter is secondary.

D. Proactive Training.

1. First, discussion of spiritual matters in the home should be all day long. You should teach your children everywhere and all the time about God's Word (Deut. 6:6ff; 11:19ff).
2. Your own and your children's spiritual well-being is dependent on everyday exhortation (Heb. 3:13).
3. The goal is to see biblical faithfulness passed down past your children to your grandchildren and great-grandchildren after you (Ps. 78:5-6; Deut. 4:9).
4. Christian education is non-optional for a Christian home (Deut. 6:6ff; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; Col. 2:8).
5. Family worship is non-optional for a Christian home (See Session Two, III.C.2).

E. The Practice of Discipline.

1. Discipline is corrective not punitive (Heb. 12:9-11).
 - a. It is to train and redirect the child rather than exact justice on them. We are to use chastening during childhood while there is hope (Prov. 19:18).
 - b. Discipline is certainly not an excuse to satisfy the parent's unrighteous desires for control ("I'll show you who is bigger and better . . .") or vengeance ("You'll pay for that . . ."). We cannot use discipline to vent our sinful response to a child causing embarrassment, irritation, inconvenience, wasting our time, or accidentally damaging our possessions, etc.
2. Disciplining our children is a matter of our obedience to God.
 - a. A failure to chasten them is rebellion against God (Prov. 23:13-14).
 - b. A failure to chasten them is hateful to the child (Prov. 13:24; 19:18).
 - c. A failure to chasten them is miserable for the parent (Prov. 29:15, 17).
 - d. A failure to chasten is a means of honoring our children above God (1 Sam. 2:29, 3:13).
3. God ordained the use of the rod in the family (Prov. 26:3). The sword was given to the state (Rom. 13:4) and the keys were given to the church (Mt. 16:19).

- a. We should follow the wisdom of God in using an implement (rod) for spanking. This requires faith in God's Word (Prov. 22:15).
 - b. The rod should be coupled with rebuke. The children need both instruction and chastening (Prov. 29:15).
 - c. The rod is necessary because children are foolish and devoid of understanding (Prov. 10:13; 22:15; 26:3).
 - d. The use of the rod is motivated by love (Prov. 13:24; Prov. 19:18).
 - e. The child will not die from the use of the rod, but it may be a means of saving his soul from eternal death (Prov. 23:13-14).
 - f. We are not restricted to the use of the rod as the only form of parental discipline.
4. Our discipline is to be a model of God's discipline of us (Heb. 12:9-11).
- a. It is never enjoyable, but it is fruitful (Heb. 12:9-11).
 - b. Discipline is directed to the heart as well as actions. Therefore, parents must learn to discipline for attitude and not just actions.
 - c. Discipline promptly (Prov. 13:24). Consistency is the absolute, number one, most fundamentally crucial element in discipline. Without it, all will fail. With it, discipline will be more effective and less frequent. Laziness, ignorance, self-centeredness, and sinful anger are all major deterrents to consistency.
 - d. Discipline should not be in anger. Disciplining consistently and immediately will prevent built-up frustration.
 - e. We are not to provoke our children (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). Ways of provoking them to discouragement include:
 - i. Inconsistent discipline for the same kinds of offense.
 - ii. Disciplining out of selfish frustration.
 - iii. Misjudging their motives or falsely accusing them.
 - iv. Failing to admit our own wrongs and ask forgiveness.

III. Marital Unity in Finances

A. This brief outline is not intended as a comprehensive treatment of this topic.

Rather, it is intended to provide some basic points of discussion for couples.

1. Your upbringing, personality and individual strengths and weaknesses will all have a role in determining your expectations about family finances.
2. You must use finances as another means of pursuing unity. You should work together on the same team and contribute your respective strengths to tackling financial problems. You will need to apply the other principles we have covered in these outlines to attain unity in finances.

B. Biblical View of Money and Stewardship

1. God and money

- a. All of our possessions belong to the Lord, and our ability to obtain wealth comes from the Lord (Ps. 24:1; 1 Chron. 29:11-12; 1 Cor. 4:7)
 - b. Our trust is in the Lord not in riches (Mt. 6:25-34; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Prov. 16:3).
 - c. We must be faithful stewards of what God gives to us (1 Cor. 4:2).
 - d. Wealth should never be an end in itself (Prov. 15:16; Eccl. 2:10-11).
2. Family and money
- a. The husband is responsible before God to provide for his family (1 Tim. 5:8; Eph. 5:29)
 - b. God teaches us to work hard to meet our needs (Prov. 13:11; 1 Thes. 4:10-12).
 - c. Contentment is a Christian virtue (1 Tim. 6:6-10; Phil. 4:11-13).
 - d. Generosity is a Christian virtue (Prov. 11:24-25; Eph. 4:28).
3. Priorities and money.
- a. We are to give the Lord his portion of our finances first (Prov. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:8-12).
 - b. Wisdom teaches us to have a plan with our money (Lk. 14:28; Prov. 27:23-24).
 - c. Save (Prov. 6:6-8).
 - d. Beware of the problems with debt (Rom. 13:8; Prov. 22:7).
 - e. Get godly counsel in important financial decisions (Prov. 15:22; 19:22; 20:18).
- C. Getting to the Root of the Matter
1. Root problems in financial tensions.
 - a. Pride (Prov. 18:12).
 - b. Selfishness (Phil. 2:3-4).
 - c. Idolatry (1 Jn. 5:21; 1 Tim. 6:10).
 - d. Laziness (Prov. 13:4).
 - e. Irresponsibility (Prov. 25:19).
 - f. Men-pleasing (Gal. 1:10).
 2. Pursuing spiritual fruitfulness.
 - a. Repentance (Ps. 139:23-24).
 - b. Study the biblical principles of finance (Ps. 119:9-11; Rom. 12:2).
 - c. Prayer (Phil. 4:6).
 - d. Planning (Prov. 6:6-8; 27: 23-24).
- D. Financial Planning
- There are a plethora of Christian resources available for practical instruction in personal finances. Look for books by Larry Burkett and Dave Ramsey.

IV. Marital Unity in the Sexual Relationship

A. The Bible gives us frank and helpful instruction on this aspect of marriage.

1. Biblical discretion and prudence are needed in addressing this area publically within the Church.
 - a. Some are too crass and lack biblical dignity. Such discussions can be perverse and degrading, which is why Paul warns not to even speaking about evil done in secret (Eph. 5:12).
 - b. Some are too prudish and lack biblical fidelity. The whole Law, which contains material about intimate matters, was read before the whole congregation of men, women, and children. The same could be said about the rest of Scripture, including Paul's epistles.
2. Every generation needs everything that the Bible teaches. In the present day of extremes God's people need a clear grasp of the biblical perspective on the sexual relationship in marriage.
3. God's people will have different comfort levels about how much should be discussed in a setting like our class. Consequently, I have included the material below for your edification, but we are not going to cover it in class.

B. Sanctity of Marital Intimacy.

1. It is ordained and designed by God and glorifies and pleases him when maintained within his prescribed parameters (Gen. 2:24-25, Heb. 13:4). In fact, the view that forbids marital intimacy is a doctrine of demons (1 Tim. 4:1-3).
2. Everything connected to the sexual experience must be limited to the marriage relationship in thought, sight, word and action (Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27-30; Prov. 2:16-19; 5:1-14, 20-23; 6:20-7:27).
3. All forms of sexual perversion transgress God's design even within marriage and are unlawful.
4. Self-control is what characterizes the courting relationship prior to marriage. For example, Scripture indicates intimate caressing is clearly not lawful and should be limited to after marriage (Prov. 5:17ff).
5. Earthly marriage points to a heavenly marriage, and earthly consummation is merely a precursor to a heavenly consummation (Rev. 21:2ff). The climax of pleasure expressed in the conjugal relationship is a tiny foretaste of the ecstasy of joy that awaits the believer in communion with God in heaven to come. The greatest delights in this world will pale in comparison to what the Lord has prepared for his people in glory.
6. The book of Song of Solomon, which is full of descriptions of conjugal love, further establishes the sanctity of marital intimacy while conveying the story about Christ and his Church.

C. Unity in the Sexual Relationship.

1. Sex should be a tangible expression of an inward reality – physical unity should be a manifestation of true, personal and spiritual unity in the marriage (Gen. 2:24-25).

2. When a couple engages in sexual relations without unity in their relationship they are in essence lying. Conversely, when true unity exists, then the sexual relationship has greater meaning and pleasure.
3. In practice this means a couple should resolve any outstanding conflicts before sex, rather than using sex as a means to cover up disunity.
4. Most problems in the sexual relationship, apart from potential physiological problems, are related to other areas of disunity within the marriage, rather than to sex itself.
5. When you are first married it is essential to establish patterns of open communication in this aspect of marriage – before, during, and after sexual relations. Discuss what is most meaningful to each other.

D. Blessings of the Sexual Relationship.

1. The sexual relationship is a gift of God that is intended to bring pleasure to the Christian couple (Prov. 5:18-19). The word “satisfy” in v. 19 means satiate.
2. Paul says that undue abstinence, except in special circumstances, should be avoided (1 Cor. 7:3-5).
 - a. Paul says that the gift of regular marital intimacy is a practical way of resisting the Devil. For those who are married, pent up, unsatisfied desires provide occasion for undue temptation.
 - b. Consequently, frequency is mutually determined by both husband and wife being willing to *give* to the other. At times this could involve Providentially determined instances of necessary abstinence. Under normal circumstances it will entail mutually agreed upon regularity because both spouses belong to each other. Note Paul’s explicit instructions in 1 Cor. 7:3-5.
 - c. It is never a matter of taking or withholding. It is a matter of seeking to outdo one another in giving what the other wants (Rom. 12:10).
3. The sexual relationship should not be one-sided or self-focused (Phil. 2:2-3). Paul specifies that it is intended to bring blessing to both the spouses (1 Cor. 7:3-5). This is a special way of “giving” of oneself to your spouse. In practice this means, for example, that a husband’s sacrificial love will be manifest by working to make sex equally pleasurable for his wife and ensuring that her needs are met in the process.
4. Men and women are created differently. Getting to know your spouse includes learning how those differences manifest themselves in the sexual relationship.

E. Further Study of the Sexual Relationship.

1. Ignorance and misguided feelings of “taboo” hinder rather than help growth in this aspect of marriage. It should be an area where openness and communication between spouses is pursued. It is a God-given, God-glorifying aspect of Christian marriage.
2. *Intended For Pleasure* by Dr. Ed Wheat is a good resource on the sexual relationship from a Christian perspective, though you may not agree with everything he says. I recommend that couples buy this to take

and read together on their honeymoon. It answers most of the questions and details related to the physical aspects of the sexual relationship.

Conclusion

A. We will end where we began. There is hope for those tempted with hopelessness. For those who are struggling in marriage, you can take great hope.

1. God's Word is sufficient to address all of our problems (Rom. 15:4; 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

2. God's grace is sufficient all our needs (Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 12:9). The believer's sin is solvable (Rom. 5:20). God's Spirit can produce growth and change.

B. I realize that we all live very busy lives. But God has established the marriage relationship as a priority for Christian couples. Since, a godly marriage has to be cultivated, and since priorities are what you do, then there has to be a self-conscious decision to devote time and effort to these matters (Jas. 1:22-25; Mt. 7:24-27).

C. You have 26 pages of outlines filled with Scripture passages to review. Go through them with your spouse and discuss the ways in which these biblical principles need to be practically implemented to your specific marriage.

D. Our ultimate goal is not happiness and bliss in marriage, though that is a precious by-product of gospel fruitfulness. The chief end of marriage is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. May Christ be the one who has all the preeminence in our marriages (Col. 1:18).