

Arguments and Reconciliation

1 Marriage Based in the Principle of Salvation

Marriages are made between two people who fall in love and who want to live together as husband and wife. Marriage was designed by God in the beginning.

Gen 2:24-25

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. NIV

The principle of marriage is much like the principle of salvation.

Salvation is the bringing together of two separate beings and making them one. Adam and Eve fell into sin and the oneness between God and they ended. However, just as the disobedience of one man brought about separation, the obedience of one man, the Lord Jesus, paved the way for reconciliation. (See Romans 5:9). God loves to be reconciled to people. For that to happen, sin has to be forgiven but can't go unpunished. Jesus took our punishment and when we put our trust in him, repent of sin and ask God to forgive us He does so and we become one with Him.

God never said to us, "When you've sorted out all your problems come to me and then we'll be reconciled." Instead God effectively says "Be reconciled to me and then we'll sort out your problems". Once we are reconciled to God, and because He loves us and won't leave us, we can let Him sort out our lives knowing we are safe in His love and that He won't cast us away when we mess up.

2 Arguments Occur

On the wedding day, all is beautiful – everyone is happy for the couple and whilst everyone knows that there are such things as arguments between husbands and wives, it just seems impossible to the couple on the wedding day that they could ever fall out. It might happen in some marriages but *not* in this one. But it does. Why? Because there is a tendency in humans to be alienated, rather than to be reconciled.

In the marriage an argument inevitably arises over some problem or other, mean things are said and tempers can flare as each tries to make their point. For some, it can lead to a real standoff – sometimes for days. Sometimes not talking, or where there are children, talking to each other through the children. If the subject of the argument arises again, the same thing happens and the impasse gets worse. It's just like Adam and God, a separation has occurred and unless something is done, things won't improve.

3 Solving the Problem

On the face of it might seem useful if a third person could come in, analyze problem giving rise to the argument and decide who is right and who is wrong. That would mean one of the marriage partners would be told by that person that they were right. That would give them a sense of pride because "They got it right" and a sense of annoyance that the other had been so argumentative. However, it would give the other a sense of defeat in that they had been wrong and they would feel humiliated. That is *not* the recipe for a happy reconciliation between the couple. Analyzing the problem and deciding who's right is not God's way. Remember, God's way is to reconcile before sorting out our problems. It comes out in Matt 5:23-24

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar . First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. NIV

4 Reconciliation

So, what do we do to break a standoff in an argument? Answer, reconcile before you do anything else. How do you do that? Just like the Lord reconciled us. There is sin to deal with which has come between you. Strong words, lost tempers, pride. So, how do a husband and wife (or any other people for that matter) reconcile after an argument?

- a) They have to put the problem down.
- b) They have to reach out to each other. Draw near to each other, touch each other- even kiss each other.
- c) They have to adopt an attitude of humility and repentance, say sorry for prolonging any standoff, ask forgiveness and let any resentment go.

That's the way we came to God to be reconciled to Him, and that's the way we do it with each other.

But what about the problem? After reconciliation they may well wonder however they allowed the problem to give rise to such a standoff! They can sort it out in spirit of reconciliation. Somehow, when reconciled, the fresh unity almost demands that both husband and wife change there ways rather than one demanding it of the other.

Christ holds all things together – that includes relationships.

Col 1:16-17

For by him all things were created (*I think that includes marriage*): things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**. NIV

Where a husband and wife are reconciled before the Lord, He will bring them together and **hold** them together.

5 Dealing with the Problem

Once reconciled, what ways are there to deal with the problem which gave rise to the argument in the first place? In that respect, first consider this scripture from Eph 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger.....along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. NIV

If that should be our attitude to other Christians, how much more so should we be that way towards our husband or wife? If we are hurting because of some issue which has caused argument or standoff, we should not just leave it in the hope that it will go away. Where, say, the husband has said something to his wife before leaving for work in the morning and which he knows has upset her, the upset will not be solved by the husband breezing home in the evening with a beaming smile and a cheery “Hello darling, I’ve bought you a bunch of flowers/box of chocolates/favourite magazine” and being especially nice to her. She’s hurting. Reconciliation is needed. Facing the issue and dealing with it in a controlled and loving way will help to begin a process of resolution.

We suggest that a couple sets time aside to deal with the thing which they know is spoiling the joy of their relationship, a time when they feel reasonably relaxed and can be undisturbed.

It is good to “separate the person from the problem” so as to tackle the problem and not the person.

Each should give the other opportunity to put forward their opinion. Avoid exaggeration and blaming the other and neither should interrupt or cut the other short by saying things like “There you go again, why can’t you see just how bad your attitude is?” or “Yes but I was only joking when I called you an silly idiot this morning. The trouble with you is you’re over-sensitive and take things too seriously.”

Remember that where a problem has reached the point where it is really spoiling the marriage relationship, both the husband and the wife will invariably find that there is something which they need to apologise for to each other, saying they were wrong and asking forgiveness and it helps to do that early on.

Looking lovingly into each other's eyes during the process of dealing with the problem, touching and holding hands helps, will show kindness and compassion and a genuine desire to mend the relationship.

Have a willingness to put things right and change behavior/attitudes so as to avoid the problem arising again

Don't give up easily if it becomes difficult to work things out. Be willing to seek help from a trusted friend or church leader if you can't manage to solve the problem yourselves.

We have an adversary, the devil, who wants to spoil marriages and particularly so where the husband and wife are Christians. Don't let him drive you apart. You have a godly one-flesh relationship blessed by the Lord and he wants you to enjoy each other and love each other always. Therefore, do all you can to preserve your precious marriage relationship, look to remain in unity and in love with each other and Him.

6 Significant Annoyances

There can be some problems which cause considerable tensions between husbands and wives and which, almost without exception, will not be resolved unless one or each of them makes a serious effort to change. The way in which one partner is always unwelcoming towards in-laws and the way in which one partner is perceived by the other as rarely helping with menial tasks in the home, and then only reluctantly, are examples.

Over the years we have listened to married couples talk about things under this heading and there is one particular issue which crops up again and again – not being clean and tidy in the home. It can be a major problem. There is the case where both husband and wife live in chaos and just put up with the continual frustration of not being able to find things and the tensions it causes between them - with each blaming the other for the state of the place. There is also the case where one wants to live tidily but the other isn't bothered, not putting things away and leaving it to the tidy one to clear up the mess. The frustration increases when an unexpected visitor arrives and the tidy one feels embarrassed about the state of the home and feels the need to say "please excuse the mess" or such like. In extreme cases, it can drive a wedge between husbands and wives, spoiling the relationship and fuelling arguments as there appears to be no end in sight to the problem. On this issue, we serve a God who is orderly and likes things to be that way (see for example the orderly way in which He created things in Gen.1:3-31, the way in which He caused the Israelites to live in an orderly way under Moses, e.g way in which the Israelites were arranged when camping Num. 2:1-34, and the way in which the Lord Jesus arranged the crowd when feeding the five thousand Mark 6:40. It is even stated in 1 Cor. 14:33 that he is not a God of disorder). As a result of the fall, it should not be too surprising there is a tendency in humans not to be naturally like God in that way and some discipline is necessary to live an orderly lifestyle – and some find it more difficult than others. However we believe that where the happiness of a marriage is being jeopardized by a messy home environment, the couple should make every effort to work at putting it right. Keeping the home tidy should be seen as an example of each serving the other, each making the home a tidy and pleasant place for the other as well as themselves – an example of serving one another in love (Gal. 5:13) and not a chore. At first it may not be easy to change but, where a couple love each other, it will be worth it.

7 Petty Annoyances

There are some problems which are less significant than those under that last heading and which shouldn't create a standoff - unless the two are already drifting well apart. Such differences might be things such as little behaviour traits (she's never on time - he often forgets to put the top back on the toothpaste; she slurps her drinks – he burps after eating; she has an irritating laugh - he shouts on the phone) or little habits (she keeps saying "innit, innit" – he keeps flicking his hair back). They are things which are no problem to one partner but which irritate the other. In such situations, we have to make allowances for one another and accept one another. We need **forbearance**.

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. 2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Eph 4:1-3 NLT

The trouble is when a couple is in standoff mode, such things tend to be thrown in for good measure.

Forbearance doesn't mean that such petty issues have to be ignored but forbearance does mean that each marriage partner is prepared to be patient. If such an issue is to be addressed it is done so gently, lovingly and at an appropriate time.

Further Recommended Reading and which has been helpful in preparing the above material:

Right Relationships by Tom Marshall.
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