

Facing Conflict!

A friend spoke with pride of the coffee stains on the dining room ceiling. *“They are a symbol of the good relationship my wife and I have.”* he says. *“In our marriage, we let our anger. Sometimes we hurl cups at each other -- filled with coffee.”*

One person wrote ... *“The family that fights together stays together.”* But we must fight fair in love and marriage. (Prov. 20:3; 17:14)

Introduction:

1. Part of the solution comes from being able to distinguish between conflict and quarreling. For most of us quarreling is a negative word. It is associated with shouting and angry outbursts.
2. Quarreling is a substitute for more gracious ways of handling conflict.
3. Conflict is not the same as quarreling. Conflict is when two or more people have something come between them. Conflict is a reaction, it becomes the basis of a quarrel. Conflict is inevitable, quarreling need not be.
4. Biblical instruction deals primarily with the reaction to conflict. The Bible never denies the reality and legitimacy of human conflict.
5. Conflict is so basic to a relationship, it is impossible to have closeness without it.
6. The presence of conflict demonstrates you have a relationship. (Luke 17:3,4)
7. Marriage sometimes is like two porcupines nestling up together in a cold night. You should expect, even welcome, conflict. You cannot get close without it.

A. The Dangers of Avoiding Conflict:

1. Having conflict is neither dangerous nor unusual. But avoiding it is.
2. Couples who have split after decades of marriage sometimes spent those years resisting conflict. They kept avoiding the issues, then they avoided each other... it was peace at any cost -- and it cost them their relationship.
3. Too often the standard way of handling conflict is backing away from it. Christians are very good at sweeping things under the rug.
4. We may be using Bible verses to cover our fear of facing truth.
5. Every time you wrestle through some divisive difference, you create a closer relationship.
6. In marriage there are two opposing forces -- attracting and repelling -- and you must deal with both of them.

B. Facing the Rock of Reality Instead of the Illusion of Peace!

1. Marriage bonds grow tougher and stronger whenever you work through the conflicts that inevitable come, but it must be done Biblically.
2. Every conflict avoided will not go away -- problems deepen, feelings become stronger, hurts are held on to, bitterness grows, and emotional deadness will be the result.
3. You must build on the rock of reality -- not on the sinking sands of deception.
4. But... **What Do People Do?**
 - a. They withdraw,
 - b. and / or they involve a third party,
 - c. they revert to sarcasm and slander,
 - d. they practice blaming,
 - e. then there can also be nagging.
 - f. Or maybe they both practice *getting even*.
5. Be willing to come together, write down the problem, seek answers from the Word of God, admit your sin and failure, ask for forgiveness, and seek solutions.

Talking About Trouble!

You have to begin somewhere. Sometime, somewhere, somebody has to take a deep breath and say, *“There is something I need to talk to you about!”* The problem is, how do you determine if this is the time to raise the issue, and also... do you know what the real issue is? And if now is the time, just exactly where do you begin?

A. Here are some guidelines:

1. *Talk about trouble IF you are the only one who can...* perhaps because you are the only one who knows what is wrong. Consider how Nathan the prophet spoke to King David.
2. *Talk about trouble if there is a problem that truly needs fixing.* Some trouble really comes down to personality or taste.
3. *Talk about trouble if it interferes with a relationship.* Be sure it is not just your feelings.

If you decide yes, you really need to talk, the next question is how.

(Eph. 4:26,27; 29-32; 5:1-2)

1. Begin with at least three affirmations.
 - a. Affirming aids communication.
 - b. You always need to affirm when you criticize.
 - c. Affirming accomplishes two things...it helps you keep concerns in perspective, and helps you to realize there are many good things going on also in your relationship.
 - d. Affirm your relationship... don't just plunge into the problem.
2. Be specific about what is troubling you.
 - a. Maybe it is a pattern of behavior or an attitude you perceive.
 - b. Start with specifics. Be careful that you are clear, but also be most concerned about your heart attitude, your words, and your motive.
 - c. Are you most concerned that the Heavenly Father is honored and glorified in it all?
3. Explain how it makes you feel and why it matters to you.
 - a. You can't be sure of someone else's attitude.
 - b. Express your feelings kindly, carefully, with clarity.
4. Don't rush toward a solution.
 - a. Maybe you have already cooked it up in your mind.
 - b. Work together toward a solution.
 - c. Make sure you thoroughly talk the problem out before you try to settle it.
 - d. Try to create an atmosphere of collaboration.

Communing About Our Conflicts In Marriage!

Discussion:

Because of your different backgrounds, you will probably have some differing feelings and ideas about conflict. It will be good to get these into the open so that you both understand each other as well as try to come to some mutual agreement in your views. Use the following discussion questions to prompt that discussion you may desperately need.

1. From the foregoing notes... discuss whether or not you both agree with the distinction between conflicts and arguments. It does make a difference how you approach things.

Him: _____
Her: _____

2. Many people withdraw from conflict. Do You? Discuss with each other whether or not you are aggressive in facing conflict or whether or not you have a tendency to back away from it. Explain why you withdraw if you do.

Him: _____
Her: _____

3. When you have conflict, how do you feel? Try to explain to each other the kinds of feelings you have whenever you and your spouse become obstacles to each other.

Him: _____
Her: _____

4. There are numerous useless reactions -- besides withdrawal -- to conflict. You will note them in... So What Do People DO? Which of these do you have a tendency to do? Why do you think you do them?

Him: _____
Her: _____

5. Here are some more potential ways people deal with conflict or things that bother them!

a. yelling	b. clamming up	c. leaving/ escaping
d. shopping	e. reading, or TV	f. working long hours
g. drinking/ drugs	h. crying	i. using sarcasm or "humor"
j. depression	k. self-pity (pity parties)	

6. Discuss these five general ways of dealing with difficulty: From worst to best them are:

a. avoidance	b. competition	c. accommodation
d. compromises	e. collaboration	<i>What Do YOU Do? WHY?</i>