

Study 0089

Practical Issues in Marriage (3.5)

Having described effective communication and its value, as well as, 'noise' or impediments to effective communication and how to eliminate such 'noise' with a view to achieving effective communication between a man and his wife, we then turned our attention, to the absolute necessity of, and key ingredients for, effective communication.

We noted that as the spinal cord in a man is vital as a link between his head and his body, which ensures his sustenance and survival, so is effective communication between a man and his wife. If the communication link between a man and his wife is broken or irreversibly severed, the marriage will be in jeopardy or will be as good as over, as the case may be! For this reason, every effort must be made to ensure that communication between spouses is maintained and must never be irreversibly damaged. Where there is a breakdown in communication, immediate restoration must be sought through divine intervention and humility!

We identified three key ingredients to effective communication between a man and his wife, as follows:

- (a) **Dialogue**, which is a two-way conversation, is very critical to effective communication between a man and his wife. Effective communication is not a monologue (speaking alone), soliloquising (speaking to oneself), or a one-way giving of orders without question. A lot of back and forth may be necessary in a dialogue, so that the message being sent by one spouse to the other is understood as it was meant to be understood by the other spouse.
- (b) **Humility** is another key ingredient of effective communication, and is required on the part of both the man and his wife; hence:
 - i) If one person is at fault he or she should promptly apologise once it is clear that he or she is at fault,
 - ii) An offended spouse should forgive the offending spouse from the heart whether or not an apology is made,
 - iii) Bitterness or resentment in the heart arising from past relationships must be effectively dealt with, lest the roots of such bitterness springing up are transferred to one's spouse,
 - iv) Both the man and his wife must be sensitive, submissive, and yield to the Holy Spirit's leading, and,
 - v) God's order on marriage should not be subjected to any form of modification whatsoever; hence, wives should submit to their own husbands as unto the Lord, and, husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her.
- (c) **Appropriate use of communication channels** is another key ingredient of effective communication. Every direct channel of communication at the disposal of a couple must be utilized to make communication effective. As much as possible, indirect channels of communication, like Third Parties should be avoided. However, where it becomes absolutely necessary to involve Third Parties, a spouse should carefully consider what he or she wants to communicate to his or her spouse, how it is to be communicated through the Third Party, and who the Third Party should be.

We now move on to the last of the five 'C's: Conflict Resolution.

Conflict Resolution

The word 'conflict' could mean 'a disagreement', 'a clash', 'an argument', 'a quarrel', 'an altercation' or 'a fight'; while the word 'resolution' indicates a situation in which the component parts of an issue or substance are identified, and put together, so that a state of harmony and accord is achieved. Thus, conflict resolution is taking a critical look at the issue(s) that have given rise to conflict, with a view to ensuring that a state of harmony and peace is achieved between the Parties involved in such a conflict. This means that conflict resolution seeks to bring about an amicable agreement where there is disagreement; a calm where there is a clash; harmony where there is an argument; a settlement where there is a quarrel; kind words in the place of an altercation (harsh words); and peaceful co-existence instead of a fight. (**Matthew 5:9; Psalm 34:14b; Romans 14:17, 19; Philippians 4:2-3**).

Any time two or more people interact together, there is bound to be some form of disagreement or conflict. This is because, people are different in very many ways, and so, trying to get everyone to see things in only one way is a very difficult proposition. People are from different backgrounds, have different exposures and experiences, are of different educational orientation, and, have formed idiosyncrasies over time; all of which culminate into different opinions on issues or the way each individual views a particular subject matter. Unfortunately, these differences which is the root cause of conflict between individuals, is sadly true of a man and his wife. Spouses are usually of different backgrounds, different socio-economic strata, different exposures and experiences in life, different educational levels and orientation, and have different views or outlook to life (idiosyncrasies), to mention a few. These differences are a potential for conflict between a man and his wife! And because these differences are real, and cannot be wished away, it is important for married couples, as well as people who are about to get married, to recognize and appreciate that conflict by itself is not a bad thing. Indeed, conflict, in the form of disagreements or quarrels, can be very useful in enabling couples to know the boundaries beyond which they should not go in their marriage. It is when such boundaries are crossed by a spouse repeatedly that more intense forms of conflict such as altercations, physical fights, etc., arise. Hence, how a couple view and handle conflict is what can make it either healthy for a marriage, or bad and ugly! And since differences exist between a man and his wife, which will not change overnight or which may never in fact change, the resolution of conflicts become even the more essential!

There are those who advocate for conflict management, which is basically managing conflict, but never really resolving conflict; and there are those who advocate conflict avoidance or a "Let sleeping dogs lie" attitude to conflict, but they end up with 'biting dogs', and sometimes, with deadly consequence. Conflict resolution may seem to be very unpleasant because it requires digging up the root cause of conflict; it is nonetheless, very beneficial to a marriage (and any relationship or partnership for that matter). It is important to note that while one spouse may be the originator of a conflict situation, it is the response of the other spouse which can either dissipate a potential conflict or give rise to a full-blown conflict (**Proverbs 15:1-2; 14:1**). It is also possible that one spouse may be conflicted within, as in the case of a schizophrenic (that is, a dual personality in one body), or may just be simply conflicted within himself or herself (**Proverbs 15:18; 19:13; 27:15; 30:21-23**). Hence, there is always a potential for conflict in such a home!

In order to resolve conflict between a man and his wife therefore, we must take cognizance of the state of the man and his wife; and, critically consider what gave rise to the conflict. Where simple disagreements become full-blown conflict, there may be more to the conflict than meets the eye! Conflicts that are personality-based are more difficult to resolve than

conflicts that are issue-based. It is always a good thing to focus on issues in trying to resolve conflict; but when such issues cannot be resolved, then it is obvious that there is a personality-related matter involved, and evidently, only divine intervention will resolve that matter. Furthermore, if either or both the man and his wife, have not allowed the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16-18, 22-23**) to be developed in them, conflict resolution will be a very difficult exercise, and will at best terminate in conflict management or toleration of each other. It is therefore essential that Christians in marriage yield unreservedly to the Holy Spirit at all times, with the result of the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit.

The rule of thumb in conflict resolution between a man and his wife, is to resolve any issue between them without any outside interference (**Matthew 18:15**). It is only where there is no sign of resolution or cooperation from the other spouse, that Third Party involvement may become necessary (**Matthew 18:16-18**). In involving Third Parties in conflict in any marriage, the spouse(s) should ensure that they involve godly people, people who can be respected by both spouse, and people who are interested in both spouses. As much as possible, avoid people who do not have the fear of God in them, and people who are quick to take sides. Where Third Parties are involved, they must seek to be devoid of emotional attachments, and should not give judgment until they have heard from both sides, and critically and prayerfully considered what has been heard (**Proverbs 18:17, 13; John 7:51**). This means that the possible reason for the conflict between a man and his wife must be identified. When acting as a Third Party in conflict resolution between a man and his wife, it is good to note that you are not likely to know the root cause of the conflict, the first time you are mediating, hence, conflict resolution for a Third Party is a painstaking endeavour, which requires prayers and intercession, as well as reliance on the gifts of the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:8-10**). Knowing the root cause of any conflict should always be the goal in conflict resolution for a Third Party, as this is the best way to effectively resolve conflict between a man and his wife; apart from divine intervention. But suffice to note here, some possible reasons for conflict in a marriage: money matters, sex, no child in the marriage, only one gender of children in the marriage (especially only females), communication issues (such as, communication breakdown, the use of abusive language, misunderstanding of what is being communicated by one spouse to the other, etc.), intentional confusion from jealous friends and siblings, spouses listening to Third Parties, family and peer pressures, taking the other spouse for granted, idiosyncrasies, intolerance in either spouse, quarrelsomeness, baggage brought into the marriage, and selfishness or self-centredness, to mention a few. Of the issues afore-mentioned, the most difficult to resolve are the last five, as they are personality-based, and will require divine intervention. Hence, identifying the reason for the conflict is a very good starting point in conflict resolution while recognizing the personalities involved. Prayers and intercession is a very powerful weapon in conflict resolution, as is the word of God (**2 Corinthians 10:3-6**). Every conflict can easily be resolved with the word of God. It is therefore thought to be easiest to resolve conflict between couples who are believers in Christ than any other combination of individuals (**Proverbs 17:14; 20:3**)! Where one spouse is not a believer in Christ, the burden in conflict resolution is always on the believer! Remember that in Christian marriage, there is no divorce, which makes conflict resolution the more important. A separation (albeit, temporarily) between a man and his wife should only be advocated in very extreme cases where there is imminent danger to life or to the safety of either spouse (**Proverbs 25:24; 21:9, 19**). Such a separation should not be allowed to go on indefinitely, but godly people should, through prayers, intercession, and godly counsel intervene in the conflict to bring about a resolution.

ASSIGNMENT

Please discuss the questions below and pray about the issues arising therefrom.

1. What other reasons can you identify as causes of conflict in a marriage?
2. What things can make conflict resolution difficult in a marriage?
3. Are there any areas of conflict in marriage that you think the word of God does not address? Which ones?