

Study 0090

Scripture Text: Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

We shall end our study on marriage with this study, as we look at the true value of marriage. We have, over the past many months discussed the principles of marriage as enunciated by the divine Author, and also, set forth practical ways of living by these divine principles on marriage. A recap of our study a fortnight ago, on the last of the five 'C's on practical issues in marriage, "Conflict Resolution", is essential at this point.

Since spouses are usually of different backgrounds, different socio-economic strata, different exposures and experiences in life, different educational levels and orientation, have different views or outlook to life, etc.; and since these differences are real, and cannot be wished away, neither do they change overnight, and may in fact, never change, we noted that the need to deal decisively with conflict in marriage is not just important, but extremely essential! How a couple view and handle conflict can make it either healthy for their marriage, or bad and ugly; because, conflict by itself is not a bad thing, as it enables spouses to know the extent to which they should go in the areas of their differences. We saw that there are three possible approaches to dealing with conflict among spouses:

- (a) **Conflict management**, which is basically managing conflict, but which never really resolves conflict;
- (b) **Conflict avoidance** or a "Let the sleeping dogs lie" attitude to conflict, which usually ends with 'biting dogs', and sometimes, with deadly consequence; and,
- (c) **Conflict resolution**, which requires digging up the root cause of conflict, and, critically and prayerfully looking at it with a view to bringing about a state of harmony; thus making it the most beneficial to a marriage.

We defined conflict resolution in marriage as a process which requires 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 spouses concerned. The rule of thumb in conflict resolution between a man and his wife, is for both of them to resolve any issue between them without any outside interference (**Matthew 18:15**); and this is where effective communication is a very valuable asset! It is only where there is no sign of resolution or cooperation from the other spouse, and communication has totally broken down between them, that Third Party involvement becomes necessary (**Matthew 18:16-18**). In involving Third Parties in resolving conflict in any marriage, the spouse(s) concerned should ensure that they involve on one hand, godly people, people who can be respected by both spouses, and people who have their interest at heart; and, on the other hand, avoid people who do not have the fear of God in them, and who are quick to take sides. Third Parties in conflict resolution in marriage, must themselves be devoid of emotional attachments and prejudices; must critically and prayerfully consider what has been heard from both spouses (**Proverbs 18:17, 13; John 7:51**); and must depend solely on the Holy Spirit and His gifts (**1 Corinthians 12:8-10**) in arriving at a resolution.

The reasons for conflict in a marriage can be issue-based or personality-based. Conflict resolution must begin with identifying the reason for the conflict, and noting whether it is issue-based or personality-based, and then subjecting such matters to prayer and intercession, and the word of God (**2 Corinthians 10:3-6**). Personality-based conflict is usually very difficult to resolve; hence, divine intervention is always required there. A temporary separation between a man and his wife, whilst not advocated, should be proposed only in very extreme cases, where there is imminent danger to the life and safety of either spouse (**Proverbs 25:24; 21:9, 19**); and such a separation should never 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.

The True Value of Marriage

Today, not many people see the value of marriage, instead, marriage is viewed as non-essential or a nuisance, and some people are even advocating having children outside of marriage, hence, the rapid growth in many nations, and sadly, in the church, of single parenthood (**1 Timothy 4:1, 3**). Our scripture text, which can be applied to marriage, filial relationships, friendship, and partnerships, tells us, as it relates to marriage, that it is better to be married (have a companion) than to be a loner. It goes further to reveal the value of such a union, as follows:

1. *“Two are better than one”*. Being married is better than being single. But it is one thing to be married; it is another thing to be united in marriage to your spouse. Thus, the scripture can be further interpreted to mean that unity is better than individuality. When married couples are united, they give synergy; that is, the value of their being together far outweighs the value of their individual efforts put together; or what is usually, mathematically expressed as $1+1=3$. Marriage is like an alloy, which is a chemical union of two separate metals to produce a third metal or alloy, which is far better in strength and quality than the two metals from which it is obtained. What this means is that as a man and his wife come together, they harness the area of each other's comparative advantage and put it to good use for the benefit of both, which is extremely profitable than if each one tried to live individualistic lives in a marriage, and do things solely for themselves. It is therefore essential that married couples seek to be united in their relationship with each other, and expend their energies resourcefully in the areas of their God-given abilities rather than engage in meaningless criticisms of their spouse's inabilities.
2. *“... they have a good reward for their labour”*. In comparison to the preceding verse (v.8), we see that a married couple who are united have adequate compensation for their labour, as against a loner who is labouring for nobody and does not even stop to ask why and for whom he is labouring so intensely. The labour of every united married couple is not just for themselves, but also for their offspring (**Exodus 23:26**), and the kingdom of God! Therefore, unlike the loner whose efforts are vain, the married couple's efforts are extremely and eternally valuable.
3. *“If they [both] fall, one will lift up his fellow”*. A ‘fall’ could be a failure, discouragement, despondency, etc., and to ‘lift up’ is, comfort, succour, encouragement, etc. Thus, even when a man and his wife have failed in their endeavours, are discouraged, or are despondent, one of them can still lift the other out of such state of misery, discouragement or despondency (**2 Samuel 12:15-24; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Proverbs 27:17**). It is important to note that where couples live individualistic lives and are in competition with each other, they will be unwilling and unable to lift each other up when even only one of them falls!
4. *“... but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.”* There is an ancient saying, “A man without a companion is like a left hand without the right.” The operational word in this verse is “help”. A loner cannot be helped, but a couple always have help at their disposal from each other. The wife is called “a helpmeet” (**Genesis 2:18**) by God, and so indeed she is, especially where there is unity in a home. Can you imagine a spouse who is promoted in the office, but due to individuality and competitiveness from the spouse, is unable to celebrate the joy of such a promotion with his or her spouse? What a calamity! The word of God, for this reason, advocates that young widows remarry, after mourning is over (**1 Timothy 5:9-15; 1**

Corinthians 7:39), and that support be extended to older widows by the church, if they don't have relatives able to support them (**1 Timothy 5:3-6, 16**).

5. *“If two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?”* At some point, a person will require the companionship of the opposite sex for the necessary warmth which the union of their bodies supply. It is in true marriage that this warmth is adequately supplied; not in any other union, nor from a pillow, which is essentially a head-rest. For those who are still single (only because God has not yet brought forth their life partner), grace is abundantly available; hence their need for such body heat is always supplied to them by the Holy Spirit which is in them. Since remarriage after divorce is not an option, this is one other reason why divorce is never advocated. For married couples to receive this warmth, they must be lying on the same bed; not in separate rooms (**1 Kings 1:1-4**)!
6. *“If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him”*. The true value of marriage becomes even more significant when we see it in operation in spiritual warfare. While it is possible for the enemy, Satan, our adversary (**1 Peter 5:8; 1 Timothy 5:14**), to overcome an individual, it is difficult for him to overcome a united married couple. The bible tells of one putting a thousand to flight and two putting ten thousand to flight, hence, in spiritual warfare, a married couple, when united, are able to deal with hordes of demons; but when disunited, they can only do so much, if at all they are able to do anything worthwhile.
7. *“... and a threefold cord is not quickly broken”*. This refers to the power of the only True Third Party in a marriage—God! When a couple are united together, and with God as the Third Party, there is nothing that they cannot achieve. Therefore, it is not just being united with one another that manifest the true value of marriage, but it is God as the Third Party in a marriage, that gives value to it! A union of this sort cannot be easily or hurriedly dismantled. The devil, however, aims at dismantling this “threefold cord” among Christians by seeking to break their link with God (**Numbers 25:1-9; 31:16; Acts 5:1-10; Isaiah 59:1-2**), and then by disuniting them (**Matthew 12:25**), because he knows that they are a major threat to his kingdom. Christian couples would therefore, do well to crucify their flesh, and recognize that there is a war at hand, and they are critical to its success!

Conclusion

The true value of marriage for the Christian couple is in their knowing that their marriage is God's fighting unit against the devil and his demons. Believers in marriage are able to effectively fight and overcome the devil (**Jeremiah 51:20-23**) when they bring forth godly seed (**Exodus 23:26-30; Jeremiah 29:1-14**), and reveal the manifold wisdom of God, Who brings together people with significant natural differences (**Ephesians 3:1-11**), and yet who are spiritually united as a fighting unit against the kingdom of darkness (**2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Ephesians 6:10-19**). Also, as Christian couples live out their marriages on earth in accordance with God's word (**Ephesians 5:22-32**), they form a powerful fighting force against the devil and demonic hordes, and are able to subdue them (**Hebrews 110:1**); something the first marriage failed to do (**Genesis 3:1ff**). Marriage is about two people living together in unity under God, for His kingdom purpose! The “1+1=3” formula for synergy in marriage has an unseen “1” which makes it an equation and not an inequality; and that unseen “1” is God, the Third part of the “threefold cord”! God never intended individualism, neither did He intend selfishness in marriage; hence, married couples who recognize the true value of their union in the light of God's kingdom will do well to ensure that their relationship with each other, and with God (individually and jointly) is well maintained! May the Lord enable us to truly appreciate and value marriage as His gift, and weapon of war

against the devil; and so, seek to do our part by ensuring that our union with each other in marriage, and with God, is constantly maintained.