

How to Strengthen Your Marriage

Mark 10:1-12

September 1, 2013

Introduction

As Christian, we are called to stay married, if we are married, to the spouse we have. Our Lord has commanded us to stay married.

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 *To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.*

It is a high calling. Divorce is the very last option between both Christian spouses. And if divorced (for reasons other than adultery), then a Christian is not to remarry unless it is to reconcile the divorced Christian spouse. We are called to seek reconciliation. It is good for us to stay married. How can we stay married and strengthen our marriage? The answer is found in Genesis.

Genesis 2:18 *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

It is not good for man to be alone. When God creates man, he is alone. However, for the first time in creation, God has said that it is not good. For every creation prior to making Adam, God says that it is good, but with man being alone, God is not finished with His design. God then makes a helper for Adam. A woman is created out of Adam's ribs, and God says that she is a helper to her husband. The word helper in Hebrew emphasizes assistance. She is a person who assists her husband to reach complete fulfillment of God's glorious design. How can a Christian married couple find such fulfillment?

Proverbs 24:3-4 *By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; 4 through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.*

Solomon understands that in order for a couple to find fulfillment that God has designed they both must have their relationship built by the wisdom of God. It starts with either of the spouse devoting themselves to the Lord with all their heart, mind, and strength. When they gain understanding and knowledge of what Scripture says about God's design in marriage, then they can experience complete fulfillment between husband and wife.

How do we experience contentment in our marriage? If we base our marriage on God's words then we will be in complete contentment.

I. One Flesh

- Intimacy

Genesis 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. 25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

- Unrestrained freedom between husband and wife—commanded by God
- Physical freedom

Hebrews 13:4 *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure.*

- Emotional freedom
 - No shame
 - No hidden secrets
 - Complete trust

Note: This is God's design of a perfect marriage. As fallen humans, we know that even Christian marriages are far from perfect.

- Understanding one flesh—relationship (for a Christian union)
 - When I get married, I am not marrying for **me**—I am marrying for my spouse
 - I married my wife to meet her needs
 - I married my husband to meet his needs
 - This is essentially what Scripture is telling us about this one flesh

1 Corinthians 7:4-5 *The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

- My whole life is for my spouse
- Note that this relationship both the husband and the wife are equal

Note: Men and women are created equal. Both are equal heirs of grace according to Peter in his first letter (**3:7**). There is no idea in Scripture that women are inferior to men in any degree. What Scripture says is that God created the perfect match that man and woman complements each other. God made men physically stronger to do work so he can provide for his family. God made women to bear children so she can nurture the family. It is the union of the two together that raises godly children.

II. Strengthening Marriage

Song of Solomon 2:15 *Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*

Note: Solomon is telling his bride to keep a lookout for pests that can destroy the relationship between the husband and the wife. There are many things that destroy relationships, but I've outlined three such foxes.

- Dishonesty

Ephesians 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

- Do not hide secrets from one another
- Lies are the first thing that destroys the marriage
- This includes money situations
- There are no situations where lying is acceptable in marriage

Proverbs 12:19 *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.*

Proverbs 26:28 *A lying tongue hates those it hurts.*

1 Corinthians 13:6 *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*

- Anger

Ephesians 4:26-27 *In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.*

- God allows us to be angry in certain situations
- Certainly when our spouse sins
- Anger uncontrolled is hurtful and sinful
- Uncontrolled anger = hurtful words to crush spirit
- This is often found in the blame game
 - It's all your fault
 - Think Adam and Eve
 - It is all about relieving themselves of any responsibility (pursue selfishness)
- Resolution
 - Sometimes anger flares up between couples—choose the right time ASAP to resolve it
 - Unresolved anger leads to bitterness and leads to unforgiveness (devil's foothold) and then it leads to hatred
 - Resolve the issue regardless who is at fault

Matthew 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.*

Matthew 6:14-15 *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Matthew 18:15 *If your brother sins against you, **go** and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*

Note: Failure to do so will result in God not listening to your prayers until such anger and unforgiveness are resolved.

- Manipulation

- Heaping guilt on spouse
 - Illustration: You never take out the trash. You always waste our money.
 - If you love me, you would do this or that
- Withholding the spouse
 - Through intimacy—by forbidding it because you want to punish him / her
 - Through money—by withholding all money from spouse
 - If you do not do what I want, then you will not get what you want.
- Nagging the spouse

Note: It applies to both the husband and the wife. It goes without saying that Solomon might know a thing or two (or 700) about a nagging wife.

Proverbs 21:9 *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.*

Proverbs 21:19 *Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.*

III. Examples in Bible

Negative example: Isaac and Rebekah (**Genesis 27**)

- There was conflict between Isaac and Rebekah—it is shown through their love to their sons
- Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob
- Isaac is ready to bless Esau; Rebekah overhears this and wants Jacob to be blessed
- Rebekah deceived her husband by using Jacob to deceive him
- The consequence of her deception carried throughout Jacob's life (runs away from home, deceived by Rebekah's brother, Laban, Rebekah never sees her beloved Jacob again)

Note: Moses never records Rebekah's death (even though he records the other patriarch's wives' death and burial). This is a strong evidence of God's disapproval of Rebekah. God had told Rebekah that Jacob was the chosen one, yet she conspired in sin to deceive her husband (apparently she did not tell him of this prophecy from the Lord).

Positive example: Aquila and Priscilla

Acts 18:24-26 *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

- Aquila is the man; Priscilla is the woman
- Scripture never separates them!
- They both were one in teaching Apollos
 - In other words, Aquila did not just teach and Priscilla filled their cups and plates and sat in the background silent
 - They sat with Apollos and explained to him about Jesus being the fulfillment of all the prophecies
 - This is equality and the sharing of the ministry
 - This is the same as what Paul says about Peter and his wife working together in **1 Cor 9:5**
 - This is the very best of what God intends in marriage

Conclusion

For marriage to work, the husband must devote his thoughts and energies through the Lord to his wife's needs. Likewise, the wife is to devote her thoughts and energies through the Lord to her husband. It is only through the Lord can we even achieve such contentment in our marriage.