



## A RIGHTEOUS MARRIAGE

### Part II

According to the Word of God, marriage is "...*honorable in all and the bed undefiled...*" However, it takes a lot of things to make a marriage truly work in righteousness: Patience, longsuffering, and diligence are just a few characteristics that need to be exhibited daily. However, one skill that is rarely talked about is the art of listening and effective verbal communication. The definition of Listening is "...*To make an effort to hear something; to pay attention.*"

In **Part II** of "A Righteous Marriage" series, we will briefly discuss the spirit of bitterness and Godly forgiveness within marriages. If we are not careful, resentment will arise in our hearts and assault our marriages. Those consumed by bitterness seem to have no hope but to watch the destruction of their marriage continue. Just recently, I heard about a marriage in which the bitterness had grown so bad that the husband doesn't even speak to his wife and another that spoke openly about her hatred towards her husband.



These are only some of the many symptoms of a marriage infected with the spirit of bitterness. There are many others. Again and again, we see couples devastated by this evil and destructive spirit. It is a pity that couples wait until their marriage is on the verge of breakdown

before they **deal** with this spirit through prayer, fasting, and dedication to the Word.

### ***Replacing Marital Bitterness with Forgiveness***

Bitterness, I believe, is the number one killer of our marriages. Many would object and say it is differences on money or incompatibility, but these people do not understand how the spirit of bitterness is a root problem to these and many other marital difficulties. It is this bitterness which, step by step, separates the couple from each other and lessening their commitment and intimacy with each other.

God wants to bring healing to your marriages. He wants to eliminate all resentment. Part of our problem is that we don't understand how He has already given us the tools to snap the intimidating influence of bitterness in our marriages through the moving power of His Word. If you could exchange a marriage where you merely tolerate each other for one in which you can't wait to be with each other, would you? There is no doubt that God created marriage to be a blessing for mankind. Both the husband **and** wife are to find great fulfillment in marriage.

Anyone who has been infected by this spirit of bitterness knows that it can be so dominating that their entire life is influenced by it. All sorts of physical and emotional symptoms pop up including lots of stress-related pains and diseases. But it doesn't stop there. The spirit of bitterness starts by destroying the relationship first.

Here are some possible symptoms of a breakdown in a relationship due to bitterness: rolling your eyes in disgust, ignoring simple requests, easily irritated, calling names, and joking about each other's shortcomings.

*"...Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:31)*

Bitterness should not be accepted in our lives. If we refused to tolerate it, then it would not plague our marriages. Bitterness prohibits the blessing that God has given to us in marriages. Why have so many couples accepted some degree of bitterness? With understanding of His Word, we clearly see that it is due to personal selfishness on one or both parties. According to the Lord, it should be the opposite in our thinking.

*"...If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..."*  
 – *Philippians 2: 1-5*



Again, the spirit of bitterness comes from the world, not the Lord. As bible Christians, it is imperative that we remove ourselves from what God has brought together in the beginning. Again, bitterness is the root of many of the problems in marriage. A bitter heart spawns all sorts of evil reactions: Wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice are all means by which resentment expresses itself.

We should take off all of these expressions of hatred and discard them, get rid of them completely. The real solution is not just to get rid of the expression of anger but to deal with the root of bitterness. Many do not understand that the reason bitterness is so devastating is that it provides the justification for being mean, cold, short-tempered or unpleasant to others. Bitterness nurtures itself through its "self-

appointed privilege." Although most of us know that it is wrong to hate others and our conscience tells us that it is wrong to do evil to others, we use "justifiable reasoning" to continue to sin against God....yes, I said sin!

*"..Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work." – Proverbs 24: 28-29*

*"...Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment... Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison." – Matthew 5: 21-22, 25*

How does bitterness do this? Bitterness fools the person by tricking his conscience. The person only needs to dwell upon the way someone offended him, and he becomes free from the protection of his conscience. A biological parallel might be the effect of drugs or alcohol on a person's body. The nerve connections become dulled so that he is able, in his drunken stupor, to do things that he would never otherwise do. Bitterness is a soul drug. It allows people to do evil things that they would not otherwise think themselves capable of doing.

I remember a former neighbor. He had so much bitterness that it destroyed his marriage and his relationship with his children. He would ride around with a gun in the car in case he got enough nerve to kill himself. It is important to know how bitterness works. It seems so powerful, but it can be disabled.

Bitterness works as long as it is being focused on. One would think that a person would spit out the poisonous venom of bitterness from his life just as I did the lemon. But people hold on to it. Why? The one who feels he or she has been wronged gains a slight sense of power and control. In most cases, these people are convinced that they are God's appointed people to carry out justice. That is right. They believe that they are doing good when they are in fact doing evil. It is this faulty sense of justice that blinds them to the evil of their actions. When this happens in a marriage, the spouse puts him or herself at complete odds against their mate. Nursing the hatred and pain extend the 'twoness' and virtually eliminates the 'oneness' of marriage. They are married, but they act as two. Two opponents. Bitterness makes this division permanent as long as he or she wants it to last.

## *Principles for Overcoming Bitterness*

### 1) Jesus said that we are to forgive with liberality.

Jesus said these words:

*"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."*

- Matthew 18:21-22

Some people try to discover circumstances in which they might not have to forgive. To tell the truth, there aren't any! As ambassadors of His coming Kingdom, we only have the right to love and show forth a mercy that God wants to distribute to the people of the world. Namely, that God's Word was in Christ and that He was to reconcile the world to Himself, not counting their former trespasses against them, and has committed to us the Word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.... (2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

Forgiveness doesn't mean someone hasn't done something wrong. **It means they did!** The difference is that you are, as Jesus instructed, not holding that moral debt against them. We forgive others because God forgave us and, with that forgiveness, gave His life for a second chance at life! By forgiving another, you allow God's divine grace to mightily work through your life just as Jesus did. It is only here we find real hope to overcome severe problems in marriages.

**Marriage:** The husband and wife must continually forgive each other for wrong that is done or perceived to have been done. There must not be even one situation or circumstance that cannot be forgiven. When getting married, it is wise to realize that your spouse, no matter how much you sense their love at that moment, will one day say or do some offensive things. Make a decision that no matter how mean, harsh, or selfish your spouse is or may be, you will forgive them because Christ has forgiven you for much, much worse things. Take steps to clean out the unforgiven issues from the past. Presently forgive anything that needs to be forgiven. Prepare for the future by pledging to God that you will forgive everyone, every time, for everything.

### 2) The scriptures state that taking vengeance is alone God's prerogative.

Never take your own **revenge**, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, *"VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.*  
- Romans 12:19

When we attempt to distribute justice, often it turns into further offenses. Personal vengeance is a far cry from God's judgment. God Himself will carry out proper justice. He is the just Judge who will exercise full judgment **when He sees fit**. We have no right to 'pay back' a person for the wrong he/she has done. *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

-Romans 12:17.

We're not stating that man does not deserve judgment, but only that we are not here on earth to carry out the job. Instead, we now have an obligation to love others and show people God's grace. We must focus on the job at hand....carrying out the gospel of the Kingdom.

**Marriage:** We are one in marriage. If we judge our spouse, then we make our spouse our enemy. Our spouse, at times, does deserve God's judgment but judgment means that the time of grace has expired. Instead, we are to plead with God that He would give grace to our partner.

### 3) We must trust God even in difficult times of oppression.

We are sometimes tempted to alter our policies toward others when they badly mistreat us. We all owe each other love. Christ gives us a totally different way from the world to think about oppression. He tells us that it is a circumstance to take joy in. We can turn the Satan's agenda around by loving those who hate us. We can turn the occasion for bitterness into an opportunity to minister. Instead of holding back God's grace by being bitter, we forgive and receive God's grace to love that person. **This is the strongest weapon we have in breaking the hardness of our spouse's hardness to God's love.** Romans 12:20-21 speaks about allowing the conscience fully to work when we respond with loving reactions rather than bitterness:

“...Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The truth of God (His Word) provides the weapons we need to destroy the “darts of the wicked”. Bitterness is no exception. Deep roots of bitterness can be clearly seen in a person’s life. They are not the same once it resides in them...Satan dominates their minds with bitterness. Although we know these truths, we need work through the steps of destroying the root of bitterness. We have the ammunition. Now we need to apply it to our lives.

## ***Steps to Eliminate a Bitter Heart***

### **1) Dealing with mild cases of bitterness**

First remember that the seed of bitterness has already been planted and has started to put out roots. We should remember that as much as we accept the bitterness, then we are, to the same degree, not able to carry out love. The marriage will very quickly decline in affection and warmth. However, a person’s mind is not totally blocked by certain lies, which means they can still reason. When we notice our spouse’s coldness, then we need to discern what is going on. We need to thoroughly pull that seed out before it puts down any roots. Once the roots are in place, it is more difficult to break through. If we don’t take care of it as quickly as possible, it allows our spouse to feel that their coldness or highly charged emotion are the best way to deal with letting us know that they are offended.

***What do I do when I sense my spouse is giving me the “cold shoulder” and isolates me?***

**Check for something you have done wrong.**

First pray and ask the Lord to prompt you about anything you have done wrong. Pay close attention to what is revealed to you. Then, gently ask your spouse what you have done to offend them.

**Resolve to solve it before sleep.**

BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity (foothold). (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Anger, which is a normal and good emotion, can be turned into bitterness if not dealt with quickly. We are not to let the sun go down on anger. We are to deal with any anger that very day. God suggests that by allowing the offense to brew overnight, then the roots of bitterness have already begun to grow. If that takes place, then we give the enemy an opportunity to mess with our minds. Sin shuts off our sensitivity to God and His truth. As long as this sin is not resolved, then we give an opening to Satan. He can deviously move in with his temptations and set up a base through which he can destroy our marriage.

**Forgive and don’t wait to be asked**

Don’t wait for your spouse to ask for forgiveness before you give it. Jesus says we need to. It is much nicer and the process complete if the offender asks, but even they haven’t, we still must forgive. Many brothers and sister in Christ have allowed an offense to stay in their heart too long. Every time this is done, our relationship with that person sours. So if our spouse has not lived out the law of love, then we should simply dismiss it. If we can’t, then we should go through the process of confrontation, apology and forgiveness.

**Gently confront and kindly discuss**



This is difficult to implement until the couple is aware of the seriousness of the problem. The offender has in most cases done wrong and is on the defensive. The offended is

thinking he is right to be offended. So who is going to confront? **Whoever notices the problem first!** More than likely, the offended spouse will not bring up the issue. We need to be so careful in confronting. Prayer and humility go a long way in helping the process along. In any case, we must be dedicated to caring for our relationship. We need to foster positive conversation, discuss what we really did, and be careful not to accuse each other. A person might wonder if it is worth even talking about it. “Isn’t it better just to forget about it?” If our spouse is offended, then we need to deal with it. If a couple regularly argues, then there is probably a lot of resentment already stored in the heart from other unresolved issues. Conflict arises easily in such situations. **Refuse to accuse.** Be a true friend. You are not trying to make yourself look right but have peace with each other. Give both sides time to adequately present their own understanding of

the issue. Remember, you are looking for the 'thorn' that has caused offense. If spotted, then you can go on to the next step.

### **Give time**

Do not corner your spouse. God's Spirit is what convicts...not us. We do not need to take over His job. We need to merely bring up the issue so that it does not sprout and slowly start growing. Again, we need to talk as much as possible and then pray. When a person starts getting defensive, then either change the direction of your conversation or come back and talk more later (hopefully the same day!)

### **Confess and forgive**

When a person has done or said something wrong, he or she should apologize by first stating what he has done wrong and then ask for forgiveness. For example: "I'm sorry for speaking so rudely to you at lunch. It was improper. Will you please forgive me?" Of course, we need to ask the Lord to forgive first. If both partners have done wrong, then the husband goes first (as he is the head and should lead by example). If one spouse is stubborn, then let the humble one start.

What happens if only one spouse apologizes when both have done wrong? Let the person who did apologize first rejoice that God has cleared that part up. His or her heart is clean. Now, they can start praying for their spouse. *(Be warned though that your spouse may accuse you of manipulation when you start to pray)* The one that has been forgiven needs to be careful or they could be offended by the spouse's unwillingness to apologize. He could end up worse than at first. If we go by the policy that we are going to forgive even if the other person doesn't forgive, then Satan can't sneak in and take advantage of our progress. Again, you should forgive even if he doesn't ask for it. Now if the stubborn spouse asks for forgiveness later on, forgive and affirm your love for one another. And praise God that no root of bitterness grew up out of that situation.

### **Always have hope...God is with you**

Always have hope in what God can do. We should not say that any situation is impossible. Remember that the evil one doesn't want anyone to intercede for you or them. Grace and mercy are the only things that can break through such barriers of stubbornness.

### **Look for Miraculous Breakthroughs**

Intimidating issues only can be broken by waiting upon the Lord. The counselor or friend must believe

in His Word. Secondly, there needs to be action with that belief. This is what Jesus did regularly in the course of His ministry. There is no greater spouse than the one who intercedes on behalf of their spouse.

### **Be Patient**

The process might take a while. They might even be bitter toward you. Though it might not sound encouraging, they might not acknowledge their bitterness until the very end. But even if it takes long, still love your spouse. This is the covenant we have made before the Lord.

## **Conclusion**



A single, well-placed stone brought down Goliath. That little stone can be equated to a forgiving spirit. When a person truly forgives as Jesus commanded, they open the streams of God's power, grace, and mercy to work. Instead of playing into

the hand of the enemy, we need to rely on God's word and spiritual counsel to guide us in His love. A forgiving spirit releases all the hostilities one has in their heart. No offense is so great or enduring that it cannot or should not be forgiven.

There is pain in forgiving. Sometimes the pain is severe. But still the words and example of Jesus call us to trust Him as we faithfully obey Him in always forgiving everyone.

Let the spirit of forgiveness rule our homes and hearts and our marriages and families will never be the same...the spirit of Jesus will live there! Jesus' command to liberally forgive is not to limit us to some lesser life but to free us to live in the power of His Spirit. Our ministry is to bring grace into the marriage not to cause a shortage of it. With this resentment gone, the marriage is instantly so much sweeter and pleasant. We can then take our situations and praise Him for deliverance and begin to help others who are going through trials of faith in their marriages.

Is this not the reason we got married in the first place? Be sure to look for **Part III** of this series in our next issue of The Scroll!

Peace in Jesus name,  
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