

FORGIVENESS

In Marriage

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Forgiveness in Marriage

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Matthew 19:5-6 (NIV)

Marriage is God's Institution

There are many ingredients necessary that make a marriage successful. One of them is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a choice and it's not easy to make; however, we *can* forgive each other in the marriage.

God said that what He has joined together let no man separate. Marriage is a covenant—an agreement to be committed by man and woman forever or until “death do us part.” We all have heard this stated during the wedding vows. There are times where couples can get caught up in the excitement and thrill of the day that they really don't focus on the vow or the covenant they are about to enter into. The commitment is for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.

Marriage is an institution established by God, read *Genesis chapters two and three* as references. The husband and wife (Adam and Eve) were living harmoniously with God together in the Garden of Eden. This, of course, changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. Sin entered into our world and we took on a nature that deviated from good (*Psalms 51:5*). This sinful nature stemmed from selfish and ungodly desires. You can see this self-centeredness in our world today. Unfortunately, this has an effect on marriages. You have two imperfect people joining themselves together and attempting to unify their hearts as one. This is not easy. It takes a great amount of work.

Think about what it takes to build a house. It starts with a strong foundation. This is why, first, it is critical the man and the woman must come to know God and accept Jesus as their Lord and personal Savior. Since God is the one who instituted marriage, he has the blueprint with instructions on how it should be built and governed. In the beginning, God made man in his image and after his likeness, giving every human a spirit, soul, and body (*Genesis 2:7*). God created male and female his

own image (Genesis 1:26). He gave them dominion (responsibility) over the earth, to take care of it. They would be the ones responsible for replenishing it as well. They had the liberty to enjoy the garden and everything in it (*Genesis 1:27-28*). There was one exception—God gave them a command to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they were to eat, they would surely die (*Genesis 2:15-17*).

Unfortunately, they did eat of what God had forbidden and sin entered in. They were afraid and tried to hide themselves from God. This is where the dysfunction began (*Genesis 3:1-6*). First, their fellowship with God was broken. They went from being confident about coming to God to being afraid to come to Him and hiding. They began to see each other differently than before. When God confronted them, they placed the blame, on one another instead of themselves. They didn't look at their actions. This behavior can be commonly found within a marriage at times. We point the blame at each other when the marriage faces a challenge. Adam and Eve's decision to eat was not all their doing. There was temptation in the Garden of Eden. The Serpent (the devil) had a very huge part to play in

their disobedience to God (*Genesis 3:1-5*). He was once in the presence of God (*read Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:13-17*). You will notice after reading those passages the devil fell from heaven because of the pride and rebellion in his heart. Now that he is separated from God and can no longer dwell in His presence, he is both God's enemy and ours. He desires to break man's fellowship with God and destroy whatever God has put together, (*Matthew 19:6*). The bible says that he comes to steal, kill and destroy (*John 10:10*).

In our marriages, we must be mindful that there are outside forces that want to disrupt the harmony and togetherness we are supposed to have in our relationship. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12)*. Adam and Eve were unaware of the serpent, who came in and succeed in corrupting their marriage. We cannot ignore the fact that Adam and Eve had a part to play in it as well. They could have protected their union by taking heed to the commandment God gave them (*Genesis 2:17*). Keeping this commandment would have kept

the devil out of their marriage. We must be aware of the serpent and our inclination toward self-centeredness. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin entered in and was passed down to the human race. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (Romans 5:12).* We all became sinners because of the act of Adam and Eve. Their offspring would be conceived in sin, and generation after generation.

Sin is a condition that brings separation. God said if they ate of the fruit of the tree they would surely die. This meant that not only would they become separated from God, but their marriage would experience death. God gave Adam and Eve the command, not because he wanted to restrict them from things but because he wanted to protect them and their marriage from what he knew would destroy it. Just think if Adam and Eve had said to themselves, “now if I eat this, what will happen? How will it affect me? How will it affect my relationship with God? How will it affect my relationship with my spouse?” Our actions can affect our marriage. The choices that we make can damage or destroy our intimacy with one another. This is why

we need God to be involved in our marriage. We need his guidance, influence, and wisdom.

Marriage is a spiritual covenant. It is sacred and reflects in the earth, how God is with us. God knows that we are imperfect people, *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust (Psalm 103:14)*. God knows that man is weak apart from Him. This is why God commanded Adam and Eve not to partake of the tree. They became spiritually dead because their fellowship with God was broken; but God never intended for things to stay this way. He wanted to reconcile Adam and Eve back to himself; and through this reconciliation, their marriage could also be restored. God is a God of restoration and reconciliation. That is why he sent Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life to be the answer and cure for the world (*John 14:6*). The Good News that Jesus Christ has come to share with everyone is the need to repent and turn back to God, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)*.

God's heart is not to destroy man but to heal man of his sin condition. Sin causes us to make choices and decisions based upon what we want and not what is beneficial for the marital covenant. Consider what God said to the children of Israel, *But your iniquities have separated between you and our God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:2)*. God loves us so much that he came to remedy our condition of sin. Only through Him can we have salvation, reconciliation, and true peace. God is a relational being, so he reasoned with his people over and over again to repent and return to Him. To repent simply means to change your mind and change your direction. If only Adam and Eve had done this, what was lost could have been restored.

In marriage, you will go through difficult times and may suffer along the way. Some of the areas such intimacy and trust can decline when emotions are strained in the relationship. This happens when we hurt each other by our words or actions. God knows our limitations and weaknesses as human beings (refer back to *Psalms 103:14*). He forgives us of our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (*1 John 1:9*). In our

covenant with God, he doesn't hold things over our heads. He doesn't keep track of our wrongs nor does he refuse to forgive. God is love (*1 Corinthians 13*). God wants us to forgive one another as He has forgiven us. At no point will he not forgive us if we ask him. As children of God, we have been given the power, capability, and strength to forgive.

Respecting Boundaries

God sets boundaries with regard to how we interact with and live for Him. Let's talk about setting boundaries with one another in our relationships. If we would be honest with ourselves, at times, we focus on how we want to be treated, what pleases us, and what makes us happy; and when our expectations aren't met we are disappointed. How often would you say that you focus on the needs of your spouse? How often would you say that you make it about them? Let's consider that the word of God states, *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but elfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not everyman on his own things, but every man on the things of others (Philippians 2:3-4 KJV)*. Jesus

summed it all up as he stated what we all have come to know as the golden rule: *Do unto others as you want them to do unto you (Matthew 7:12)*.

This is an important key to setting the boundaries in our marriages. How I want to be treated and handled is the way that I should treat my spouse. It's not as easy as it sounds because we can become so easily offended at times by the actions of our spouse who, outside of God, is the closest person to us. We may want to ensure that we don't have too many high and unrealistic expectations of one another.

Some challenges and problems are bigger to deal with than others. We understand that there may be the need for intervention at times through the Word of God, godly counseling, and prayer. It is very important to join a church fellowship and regularly attend platforms and classes that will provide guidance in your marriage. This will help bring your union under the covering and influence of God, who knows what is best for our marriages.

The Strength and Protection of God's Character

God does not want us to hold onto things because it's unhealthy and will eventually lead to bitterness and bring defilement into our marriages. We come to learn as we grow by living out our faith in God that we have to make room for mistakes and hurt within our marriages.

As Christians, we know that we are to have fellowship with Christ and grow in His image (character). If you want to have a healthy marriage, these essential characteristics of God, found in *Galatians 5:22-23*, are needed: *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance*. There is no limit (boundaries) to these characteristics. God's love is unconditional and not based on circumstance. God never changes, even if we do. Making a choice to operate in God's character will keep the works of the flesh out of your marriage and protect it from the influence of evil forces. It's a shield or force field. Have you ever seen one of those movies where the superhero has the power to put a shield around others to protect him/her so that no foreign enemy can come in to do

harm? This is what these characteristics do for a marriage. They form a shield so strong that the Satan and his influences cannot penetrate. When we step out of these characteristics, then we let our shields and defenses down. Anything opposite of those nine characteristics (read *Galatians 5:19-21*) gives ungodliness an open door to come right into your marriage.

Imagine if Adam and Eve (*Genesis chapter 3:1-6*) would have kept the serpent out of their marriage by obeying God's command. Even the best of us will make a willful choice to do things our way because of self-centeredness. We will hurt our spouses at times and will need to forgive one another. Our marriage covenant comes with that agreement. God is so open in the relationship he has with us that he said if we offend him, we can just come to him, admit our sin, ask for him to forgive us, and he will (*I John 1:9*).

Taking ownership is Key

We have to learn to be patient and pray for one another. There are things that are done that hurt us and crush us, but God can heal and mend our broken hearts. There will be

offenses in marriage that we will have a difficult time letting go; however, it's may be a challenge attempting to bounce back or recover, but we can because God is the healer and restorer. He desires to heal your marriage. One effective way to open the door for emotional healing is you both have to take ownership of the part each of you played in damaging your marriage.

Adam and Eve didn't do that when providing an explanation to God about the dysfunctional condition of their marriage. Each placed the blame somewhere else (*Genesis 3:12-13*). Neither examined themselves and said, "by my choice, I disobeyed God. My actions were selfish. I thought about myself and not how it would affect my spouse and God."

Forgiveness is a powerful part of God's nature. God wants to restore and mend our broken marriages. He doesn't want them dysfunctional and ending in divorce. This is not the answer or the way. It will take hard work, and some people would rather get out of the marriage than suffer; but remember the commitment and vows you made before God. Don't follow the secular society. Look at the beauty and power of God's

forgiveness toward us. It brought us even closer to God. It has the power to transform and change our lives. How would a husband and wife grow in their marriage as a result of learning how to forgive?

In Conclusion

I cannot stress enough how important it is to connect with a church fellowship or community where there is development for marriages, families, men and women, and young people. There is so much guidance, instruction, counsel and strength available through the Word of God. It's important to get under the covering of a church that targets growth and affects change in our spiritual and practical lives. Attending church helps us to see where we really are and conform to God's image (His character).

Reference

The Holy Bible: King James, Amplified, New American, New International Parallel Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1999.
