

Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

Part of the theology of sin is how the believer is to deal with sin. Using these truths as a normal course is honoring to God. Following these guidelines is especially helpful in resolving conflicts in marriage.

1. Confess sin to God (1 John 1:9). Repent (Proverbs 28:13, Revelation 3:19). Agree with God about your sin (He hates it; I hate it). Do not conclude prayer until you can honestly say "Lord, I intend to not sin against You in this way again."

2. Confess your sin to your spouse; ask them to forgive you (Matthew 5:23-24, James 5:16). Take responsibility for your sin. Even if your spouse also sinned against you, the topic of this conversation is your sin. Let your mate know you have repented in prayer. Specifically ask for forgiveness ("I'm sorry" may mean "will you forgive me?" but it is often used in our culture in other ways: "I'm sorry, it's just how I am" or "I'm sorry you let this bother you"). Asking forgiveness shows you see sin as sin and is what Scripture says to do (Luke 17:3-4).

3. Forgive any sin by your spouse against you (if they asked: Ephesians 4:32/if not: 1 Corinthians 13:5). To forgive as God in Christ has forgiven you means you will choose to not remember this sin, you will not hold it against them and you will not speak of it again.

My wife and I began following these steps in our marriage eight years ago. What a difference! Arguing, blame and ongoing hurt feelings were replaced by biblically resolved conflicts and closeness.

For us, step 3 took extra effort. We had each built patterns of thinking about the sins against us, remembering unkind words for the rest of the day. We knew forgiving like God does meant remembering sin no more; it took much help from God to do this. We developed options for things to think about instead of the sins against us: remembering God's kind forgiveness of our sins, remembering Christ's blood paying for that sin, remember that price for our own sins – enabling true life to begin, giving thanks for the other person and considering ways to show love to them the rest of the day. By God's grace the transition occurred. Since then, conflicts end in dealing with sin biblically with God, including repentance, and forgiving each other. The final result is love. We so appreciate being truly forgiven by the other person. We also appreciate the humility before God needed to repent and confess sin. The resolution of conflict ends in kind words and warm embraces.

By God's grace, we have seen other marriages changed in the same manner. Many couples with whom we have met for counseling have followed the same principles from the Word with God's help. They now resolve conflicts and deal with sin biblically. The practical truths of theology transform lives.