

CHRISTIAN HOME IN AN UNCHRISTIAN WORLD

by

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CHAPTER 7

PROBLEMS AND COMMUNICATIONS

"How to be Happy Though Married"

When my wife and I were married, immediately we began to have a tremendous problem between us. She would always squeeze the toothpaste tube in the wrong place. I tried everything to make a wrong into a right, even to finally taking a tube and etching on it the words in the proper place -- "Press here." It didn't do any good.

It seems my wife has the idea that as long as tooth paste comes out the end of the tube, what difference does it make where you press! [*** It doesn't seem as though these lessons are "too" out-dated].

After years of frustration in this area, I have some advice for you newlyweds who may have this same problem. All you need to do to solve the problem and alleviate the emotion packed situation is just buy a can of "tooth powder." Just think! All of our marriage problems could have been solved had someone just give me that simple advice years ago.

How strange it is that the Lord seems to draw together those who are opposites in so many areas.

- One will love onions; the other will detest them.
- One will desire the bedroom window to be wide open in the midst of winter; the other one wants it closed and the heat on.
- One wants to spend money; the other wants to save it.
- One wants to go out on Sunday afternoon for a drive; the other wants to stay home and sleep.
- One wants to save things and not throw anything away; the other wants to save nothing and throws everything away.
- One is accustomed to going to bed early; the other late.
- One arises in the morning wide awake; the other takes an hour before beginning to navigate.

And on and on we could go.

All of these are small irritations which are minor even though often they bring frustrations. Normally, when a couple comes to a counselor, they will mention quite a number of these minor irritations; but these are not the main things of conflict at all. The main issue goes deeper into the basic areas of life.

If a husband notices every woman that passes, a wife has a right to be upset. There is a legitimate problem. Her reaction to this problem, however, will normally only complicate the problem rather than solve it.

Now it is impossible to solve all the diverse and varied problems that can arise in marriage in a public message. However, it is possible for me to eliminate 50% of all the problems that will ever come in your marriage, if you will listen carefully and then adjust your life accordingly.

In 50% of the problems of married life, finances are at the core. This will lead to the nagging wife, the bitter husband and may even lead to alcoholism. It will cause problems in every area of marriage, including how much to give to the Lord, how often you go out to eat, what you buy for the children and the home as well as yourself. If a couple can master this area, they will have come a long way towards mastering all of their problems.

Let us begin with money and you as a person. Then we will come back and add a partner to you.

You tell me your attitude toward money and I will tell you what kind of a person you are. Many passages deal with you and your pocketbook.

I Timothy 6:6-12: **"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."**

Billy Sunday said a man had two conversions. The first one was with his soul, and the second one was with his pocketbook. Did you realize that nearly 50% of all of our Lord's parables deal either directly or indirectly with money? Man is very money conscious, yet our love is not to be for "filthy lucre" but for the Lord supremely. Having food and raiment we are therewith to be content.

What GOD gives us is from His hand. It is all from Him. We are stewards of all that we have, not just a part. GOD's word teaches stewardship, not ownership. It is not a matter of our giving 10% and then doing anything we please with the other 90%. The Lord is concerned about the 100% because He is concerned about the 100% of me. He first wants us to give ourselves to the Lord: **"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first give their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."** Then everything else will be right.

To put it in another way, GOD is not concerned with how much I give, but in how much I keep for myself. One man may give \$100.00 each Sunday, but he has \$200.00 left over for himself. Another may give only \$10.00 but he has only \$50.00 left for his weekly needs. Our attitude is far more important than the amount: "**And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasure: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.**" (Mark 12:41-44).

The issue, then, is not how much I should give, but how much of GOD's money I should keep for myself and my family to take care of our needs.

With this in mind, namely that what money you keep is just as much the Lord's money, and that it is a sacred trust to you as a believer, then you can see the importance of wise, careful expenditures and of accurate records.

Since finances are involved in 50% of all family problems, no couple -- regardless of the amount of income or the sources of income -- should be without a budget; and a budget once set in operation should be adhered to by everyone unless it is broken by mutual consent of all involved.

I have counseled with Christian families who were leaders in the church and had been married for fifteen and twenty years with children in high school and college and yet were ready to break up the marriage and call it quits simply over finances. In one case the husband was making \$10,000 a year [1961]. This is why I say that this thing has nothing to do with whether you bring home \$200.00 a month or \$2000.00 a month. It has to do with issues in which we become very much involved. When we become emotionally involved, we can see nothing, nor do we hear anything, for our emotions block all avenues of communicating.

Just as no church should be without a budget that controls all expenditures, so no home should be without the same. If a church operates without a budget, a few may be on the board who are only interested in music. They will say the church's needs are one thing, and perhaps purchase a new organ. Others may feel there was nothing wrong with the organ they had. The point is this: Without a budget approved by all involved, you have left yourself open to criticism, and oftentimes just criticism, in the expenditure of monies. Operating by a budget gives no one the right to be upset if you have kept within the budget.

When talking about a budget, and a family living by a budget, it is not enough to just mention this fact and leave it. For there are some important ingredients that must be included in a budget or else there will still be conflicts. To put it another way, some of the nonessentials are really essentials, and we will explain why. The categories may be something like this:

Offerings: The Lord is to receive the Firstfruits, not the leftovers

Groceries

Household Expenses

Clothing
Rent -- Purchase
Utilities & Phone
Car -- Payments
Car Gas, etc.
Car Repairs
Car Insurance
Health Insurance
Medical Expenses
Furniture
Social - Recreation - Vacation
Savings
Misc. -- Emergencies
His and Hers Spending Money

This last category is one of the most important. It is that money -- be it large or small -- that is set aside each month for the husband and wife to use any way they want to use it and without any consultation with the other or any criticism from the other. He has some and she has some. If they do not want to use it at all, that is fine. If they want to use it for ice cream, or model airplanes, or paper dolls, or just blow it, that is perfectly fine. They have that right for that amount agreed upon in the budget.

Now there is one more category, and you can list this LOK. This will not actually be a part of your budget as such, but it will come in each month as you try to balance the budget. LOK stands for "Lord Only Knows," and it is the differences between the written expenditures and the actual expenditures.

Now what is the thing that usually happens. Normally, the husband gives the wife so much money to run the home, and he has no idea of the cost of things and what it takes to operate a family. The wife runs short and why? Because the kids needed new shoes, and she bought a new dress -- the first new dress she has had in a year. He looks in the closet and it looks like she has all kinds of clothes. Why did she need a new dress? He becomes infuriated because she needs more money, and she becomes so emotionally upset over the whole thing because he has no care or concern, that there is a coldness which reaches on into every area of their lives.

Often the man feels, since he is the head of the house, he has a perfect right to do as he pleases with the money he earns; and he purchases a rear speaker for the car radio, but finds fault with his wife when all she has bought are just the essentials. She is upset and he is upset, and yet it all could have been avoided.

A budget is a means of reducing problems and making our spending intelligent rather than indiscriminate. It requires both the husband and the wife to work at it and to keep a record of everything that they spend. But this small inconvenience will pay for itself multifold in the problems it eliminates. Now a budget must be the product of constant family prayer and planning. You see, it is not the high cost of living that hurts, but it is the cost of living high.

When a family lives above their income, someone will pay a high price for it. This only increases tensions and pressures. A budget that is adhered to can save many a heartache in this area.

One of the saddest things of this 20th Century is Christians who are unable to pay their bills simply because they have charged more things than they have income to pay. These individuals have lost completely their testimony and witness for CHRIST, but they have lost more besides. They have lost the joy of the Lord because of worry and financial problems which they themselves have created.

A very good policy to adopt is "Pay as you go, and if you can't pay, don't go." I say this not because I am against credit, nor because I do not use credit myself, but because I have seen in the lives of too many Christians what it has done. When you have seen the mental torture and emotional strain that is upon people who have monthly bills for \$500.00 above their monthly income, you will know what I mean. One Christian I know has been working three years to get out of debt and they said they have learned their lesson. Never again will they allow themselves to be in this position. It all could have been avoided had they set up and lived within a budget.

There is nothing wrong with using credit within your budget for our Lord Himself said in speaking to the man who buried his talent: "**Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury**" i.e., interest (Matthew 25:27). Now if it is morally right to receive interest, it is by that same token morally right to pay interest if the need arises. But it is never morally right to obligate yourself more than you can pay. A word to the wise is sufficient.

It is always a good policy never to buy anything larger than a broom from a salesman who comes to your door without consultation together with your spouse, praying about the matter and waiting at least one day before you decide. This is why you have a partner in life -- to consult one with another. Many heartaches and problems will be solved if this is a standing law of operation in your home. Any salesman, without exception, who says you must sign now, immediately, is automatically out to take you for a ride down swindler's lane. Any legitimate business deal will give you time to seek the Lord's will in the matter. If they don't, don't!

Before I leave the budget, I want to say one thing more. If you will be wise and prayerful in your expenditures, GOD will always supply your needs; and as a reward, He will give you some of your wants as a bonus. However, if you are foolish in your spending, you will live in constant misery and even the wants you buy will never satisfy.

I have stressed finances in the marriage, because if I can take care of 50% of your problems in one sweep it is worth it, and it will save your Pastor in the long run much personal and individual counseling. There are many other areas that from time to time are involved in family problems. All the rest of the areas of conflict are quite individual to each situation and each family, and if any problem ever arises, please go for help immediately.

The sun is not to go down and you still have wrath in your hearts as husbands and wives (Ephesians 4:26). If it does, you are headed for still more problems the next day and compounded problems the day after that. By the time you decide to go to your Pastor, the situation is usually so bad, and so many things have happened in the mean time, that you have usually forgotten what started it all. I repeat once again: "A stitch in time saves nine"; and a word in time saves nine -- nine hundred.

One of the saddest things to a pastor is that often in this area people who are not members of the church will come to him, while members of the church will not. Part of the problem is not that they are afraid someone else will know they are having problems, for they are not afraid their pastor will divulge their confidence. Their problem is that they are just too proud to admit they are having problems. Oftentimes they may be in leadership in the church and it is a humbling experience to say in effect; "We are having difficulties that we are not able to solve ourselves." Particularly is this true of men. Few men ever want to admit they have failed in anything, and so they want to keep on giving the outward pretence that everything is all right. Now I agree with you men that family problems are for the family circle only and should not be discussed outside. But there must be an exception to that rule when the problem cannot be solved in the family unit. You must go to someone who can mediate between the two.

I have had associates and their wives come to me on the verge of separation and their problems were solved. Did I think less of them for coming? Not on your life. I thought much more for their coming than I would have had they tried to go on living as if everything were fine, when in reality they were just putting on a pretence. The thing that concerns your Pastor in this hour in which we live is the fact that many Christian couples who know divorce is wrong, are merely tolerating one another and are pretending that they are happy. Their way they have learned to avoid conflict is by keeping each other at arm's length and agreeing to disagree. But this is a truce, not an union. This is not even marriage, let alone Christian marriage. If this is all that the Lord is able to do in our lives, I would classify Him as a failure, or to put it a little more pointedly and truthfully, I would classify the Christian life a failure. This thing is serious, and any pastor that loves his sheep knows all about their lives though they do not say a word. "You mean to tell me it shows?" It shows like an open book. This thing is not something that can be hid regardless of how much the persons seek to cover it up and pretend that everything is fine.

Just as it shows when two people are in love with each other, so it shows when two people have left their first love. Even though they may go through certain motions, yet there is something missing, and it is crystal clear to everyone looking on. If your love for the Lord is fervent and active, you do not need to say a word. Everyone will know it. If your love for the Lord has grown cold, even though you may go through the motions of prayer, Bible reading and church attendance, your heart is not in it. It is exactly the same as this.

One pastor of a Bible-believing church told me just two months ago he does not know of one truly happy Christian home in his entire congregation. Think of this! This is exactly why this thing is so serious. You do not have a Christian home just because everyone in the home is a Christian. You only have a truly Christian home when the principles of the Christian life are lived out daily by each member of the family in the home. And the Church is no stronger than the families that make it up.

What is the problem? Communication. For any successful marriage there must be communication. For any successful Christian marriage there must be communication with each other and both with the Lord.

We have all heard the familiar phrase: "The family that prays together, stays together." But we might add: "A family that talks together, walks together." Again I repeat: "You cannot both be close to the Lord without both being close to each other!"

Marriage is never quite what is expected. Often a wedding is the joining of two entirely separate and individualistic dreams about marriage, and when the dream is contrary to reality the awakening shock can be devastating. Usually couples regard marital conflict as destructive and seek to avoid it at all costs. Now avoiding conflict can be the worst thing possible. Both partners should work together to resolve all conflicts, not avoid them. Disagreement between two healthy, mature, and thinking people is inevitable. The only way they could avoid conflict is to keep each other at arm's length. But that is settling for a "cold war" in place of a "hot one"; or better, in place of solving their problems permanently.

Communication -- the most important word in marriage. A couple must be able to talk on any subject at any time with their partner without emotion and arrive at a healthy, mature decision which is acceptable to both members.

Again I repeat: It is not the talking that is important. The talking is only the means to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the problem.

But notice I said they must talk "with their spouse," not "to their spouse." In order for there to be communication, we cannot be controlled by emotion. When we are controlled by our emotions, we can never communicate anything; and the talking we do, degenerates to arguing and even to saying things we never would say except in the desperation of frustration. This is why such a problem often exists between a parent and a teenager. Emotions are involved on both sides; and when emotion is in, communication is out.

Should your marriage ever degenerate to this state, I remind you that this is a sign of love. This is a sign you love your husband or that you love your wife. Under emotional strain and in desperation you have said things which you did not mean at all. You say them because you love the one you are unable to communicate with and so you will say hurtful things because you love them. Your reaction in your frustration in doing this is both unwise and sinful; but if you did not love them, you would not have cared and, therefore, your emotions would not have been involved.

May I give you one word of advice. Never, never talk when your emotions are involved; because you will resolve nothing, and only add to the problem. If you cannot talk without emotions, you must seek a third party that you both have confidence in and to whom both of you may go separately and together. It is then the counselor's responsibility to convey to you and your partner, without emotion, the problems that exist on both sides.

Some warnings would be:

Never talk about the problems in front of your children. Wait until the children are not present. Let neither one of you break this law of operation.

Never speak about the faults of your mate before relatives, acquaintances or strangers. This is a coward's way of bringing up things we are unable to discuss alone with our wife or husband. If you are a real man, or woman, talk to them in private. This is almost a sure way to open the door to immorality whenever it is said to members of the opposite sex.

Do not continue talking when your emotions become involved. This is a must for both. It is essential for neither one to think that because they had the last word they won the argument. If someone is trying to have the last word, you are not communicating anything.

Never under any circumstances bring skeletons out of the closet. If you are this kind of person, you are not interested in solving anything. You are only interested in always being right, and always getting your own way. If you wanted to live this kind of a life, why didn't you remain single?

Be quick to admit you are wrong. Any fool can defend and justify himself, but it takes a real person to say some of the greatest five words in the English language: "I'm sorry, I am wrong." If you are the kind of a person that is never wrong, you are all wrong.

Never nag or keep picking at your mate. What in the world do you think this will accomplish besides increase the problem? Receive the instruction of Scripture and govern your life accordingly: "**The contentions of a wife are a continual dropping**" (Proverbs 19:13b). Someone else said, "The quarrellings of a wife are like a constantly dripping leak."

"It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house" (Proverbs 21:9; 25:24).

"It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman" (Proverbs 21:19).

The point of these last two is that to live alone in isolation is better than with a nagging wife.

"A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind" (Proverbs 27:15-16a). Wind only howls the more it is pent up, and it cannot be done.

I have seen women do this and never even realize they were doing anything wrong. Now I am speaking only of Christians and not talking about the unsaved. Oftentimes a man cannot open his mouth without his wife saying something concerning every statement he makes. This is a terrible situation and there is only one thing worse than a woman doing this . . .

It is when a man does it.

If everything your mate does irritates you, there is something wrong with you. If you let minor irritations throw you, what will you do when the major ones come along? Be truthful with yourself and with your husband. Your problem with him is not that he leaves the newspaper on the floor, his shoes under the bed or fails to hand up his coat. These are only things you are using while the real problem is far more fundamental and you have failed to communicate it to him; or having tried to talk to him about the real problem, he only laughed or failed to understand.

Husbands, when your wife begins to be sensitive, something is wrong. You may be totally oblivious that you have done anything wrong or failed to do something right. But part of dwelling with a wife "**according to knowledge**" (I Peter 3:7) is for you to understand by their

actions and attitudes when something is wrong and go to them without emotion and talk it over.

Don't let anyone tell you differently: "You can be happy though married."

But both of you must work at it -- together!

~ end of chapter 7 ~
