

## The Christian Home (16): Communication

Having addressed mutual duties for husbands and wives, specific duties for husbands and wives, we come now to two necessities for a healthy marriage: good communication and Biblical confrontation.

### I. Communication

1. *Its importance.* Good communication is essential to any relationship: God and man, employer and employee, husband and wife, parent and child. "Wherever you find marital failure, you will find a breakdown in real communication. Wherever you find marital success, you will find a good communication system" (Mack).<sup>1</sup> Communication is necessary to promote unity and deepen intimacy. (1) Promote unity. Within marriage, a man and woman become one flesh (Gen.2:24). "To a large extent, a married couple's experience of genuine oneness will be determined by the health of their communication system. Nothing, except their union, communion, and communication with God in and through Jesus Christ, is more important to the development of genuine oneness" (Mack).<sup>2</sup> True unity is impossible without open and two-way communication. (2) Deepen intimacy. Only open and honest self-disclosure can deepen our closeness and intimacy. "Communication is fundamental to a Christ centered home because it is the means by which a husband-wife relationship is established, grows, and is maintained" (Adams).<sup>3</sup>

Scripture asks, 'Can two walk together except they be agreed' (Amos 3:3)? Wherever you find two people who are continuously and harmoniously walking together, striving toward the same goals, conducting their lives according to the same standards, giving mutual assistance, enjoying sweet fellowship with one another, you can be sure that they are in agreement. And if they are in agreement, you can be sure that they have learned to communicate with one another. Continuous, progressive harmony and agreement are impossible without good communication. Good interpersonal relationships require good communication.<sup>4</sup>

To the degree that two people reveal themselves to each other, they will experience relational intimacy. Since marriage (becoming one flesh) is the most intimate of personal relationships, the revelation of yourself to your spouse should exceed the revelation of yourself to any other person (except the Lord, who knows you more intimately than you know yourself). Practically speaking, that means that you should be more intimate with (and should reveal more of yourself to) your spouse than your closest friend, your parents, or your children.<sup>5</sup>

2. *Its components.* (1) Proper tone and gesture. "Communication involves more than just words. It also involves our tone of voice and our nonverbal communication" (Priolo).<sup>6</sup> "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones" (Prov.16:24). "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov.15:1). Eye contact is essential to good communication. "Look at your wife when she is talking to you (especially when she is expressing her thoughts about those things you know are important to her)" (Priolo).<sup>7</sup> Assure her that what she's saying is important to you. She isn't merely a distraction from what's truly important. "As much as possible, make it a habit

---

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 56

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 56

<sup>3</sup> Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 28

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 55-56

<sup>5</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 54

<sup>6</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 69

<sup>7</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 72

to *stop*, *look*, and *listen* when your wife is addressing you. *Stop* what you're doing when she begins talking to you (e.g., put down the newspaper or magazine, the laptop or smart phone; turn off the television set, and so on), *look* her directly in the eyes, and *listen* intently to what she is saying to you" (Priolo).<sup>8</sup>

(2) Charity and acceptance. Don't jump to conclusions or judge motives, but give the benefit of the doubt. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things" (1Cor.13:7). "Love, in the absence of real evidence, puts the best possible interpretation on the facts" (Priolo).<sup>9</sup> While we can judge words and actions (and possibly attitudes), we are unable to judge motives. We do not know what's in the heart of our wife or husband. We must not presuppose an evil motive. We must receive their words with charity and acceptance. We must believe the best about them until further facts are known. "In reference to good communication, our judgmental, critical, demanding, overbearing, demeaning, bitter spirit must be replaced with a charitable, encouraging, forbearing, and accepting spirit" (Mack).<sup>10</sup>

(3) Honesty and openness. "I cannot really know my wife, she cannot really know me, unless we are open and honest with one another. We cannot really know each other or relate to one another in depth until we open wide our hearts" (Mack).<sup>11</sup> But this doesn't mean we must always say everything that we think. Wayne Mack provided several questions that need to be answered "in the exercise of openness and honesty." "Is it really true?"; "Is what I would like to say profitable?"; "Is this the proper time for me to say it, or would it be better for me to wait?"; "Is my attitude right?"; "Are the words that I will use the best possible way of saying it?"; "Have I prayed about this matter, and am I trusting God to help me?"<sup>12</sup> He concluded, "No couple can really become one without openness and honesty in communications. At the same time, *it must be the right kind of openness and honesty*. Otherwise, it will destroy rather than enhance good relations."<sup>13</sup>

(4) Mutual self-control. By this is meant, we must refrain from all that's harmful to good communication. (a) Selfishness. We must be willing to talk even if we are tired and don't feel like it. We must be willing discuss topics that may interest us little. We must exercise self-control both with reference to the timing and topics of discussion. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil.2:3-4). "When you are willing to talk to your wife about the things that interest her (no matter how trivial or uninteresting they may be to you), you will be demonstrating a Christlike sacrificial love that makes it easier for her to open up to you" (Priolo).<sup>14</sup>

(b) Sinful anger. "Because of a lack of self-control, many a wound has been inflicted, many a painful blow has been struck, many a marriage has been poisoned or sabotaged. Hateful, vindictive, hasty, careless, bitter, and cutting words have been hurled at the other person, leaving them battered, beaten, weary, and hopeless. The result? Lines of communication are shut down, and the marriage relationship deteriorates" (Mack).<sup>15</sup> "Anger may be handled wrongly in either one of two ways: blowing up and

---

<sup>8</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 72

<sup>9</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 79

<sup>10</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 66

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 58

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 61

<sup>13</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 61

<sup>14</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 56

<sup>15</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 63

clamming up" (Adams).<sup>16</sup> "There are two extremes that corrupt expressions of anger usually take. At one end of the spectrum is *ventilation* (blowing up), on the other end of the spectrum is *internalization* (clamming up)" (Priolo).<sup>17</sup> Lou Priolo then clarifies: "Sometimes people don't just blow up or just clam up; they mix and match these sinful responses. That is, they either blow up first and then clam up, or they clam up until they 'can't take it anymore' and then blow up." With respect to clamming up, Priolo said: "This includes such things as sulking, pouting, walking away with no explanation, giving your spouse the cold shoulder, refusing to discuss it any further, and retreating to your favorite pastime activity rather than addressing the problem."<sup>18</sup>

(c) Trigger phrases. Such phrases as "You never," or "You always," are not only offensive and often provoke a poor response, they are also untrue. "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph.4:25). "It is almost certainly not true that your wife is *always* or *never* or *only* as bad as you make her out to be when you use such inaccurate language" (Priolo).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, such phrases are often used intentionally to provoke our spouse.

(d) Excessive emotion. This is especially necessary for women. "When hurts or disapproval or conflict come, it is easy for some of us to give way to tears. His then becomes our natural, habitual response to hard situations. We must, however, pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to exercise control and change our response, because manipulative or crocodile tears will clog the circuits of good marital communication" (Mack).<sup>20</sup>

(e) Blame-shifting. This began with Adam in the garden, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen.3:12). "Pride not only blinds us to our own sin, it also looks for someone other than ourselves to blame" (Priolo).<sup>21</sup> "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt.7:5). "You ought to assume 100 percent of the responsibility for your own sin (even if you believe you are only 5 percent wrong and your wife is 95 percent wrong)" (Priolo).<sup>22</sup>

The next time you and she begin to blame each other for something, why not offer to be the first one to lay your neck on the chopping block? Perhaps you might say words to this effect: 'Honey, look—you think I'm to blame, and I think you are. Why don't you tell me exactly what you think I've done wrong? When you do, I promise to be attentive, to acknowledge where I've sinned, to ask your forgiveness, and by God's grace to repent of my sin. The only thing I ask is that, after we've dealt with my sin, you let me talk to you about how I believe you've sinned.'<sup>23</sup>

(5) Sincere listening. "Of all the principles in effective communication, none is more important than good listening. Good communication is a two-way street involving free, open conversation and careful, attentive listening. It involves both the sending and receiving of a message. Without both, good communication is impossible" (Mack).<sup>24</sup> Wayne Mack provided three factors about good listening. (a)

---

<sup>16</sup> Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 31

<sup>17</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 74-75

<sup>18</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 75

<sup>19</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 80-81

<sup>20</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 65

<sup>21</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 81

<sup>22</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 81

<sup>23</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 81

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 68

Good listening involves letting the other person speak without interruption. "But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (Jas.1:19). "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov.18:13). "By this standard many husbands and wives are fools and ought to be ashamed, for they constantly interrupt one another when they are talking" (Mack).<sup>25</sup>

Not only is it inconsiderate to interrupt, but it may also communicate a 'know-it-all' attitude that essentially says, 'I know where you're going with that, and you are either wrong or are not focusing on the right issue. Let me tell you how it really is.' So let your wife (husband) finish her argument, or you may end up embarrassing yourself and provoking your wife.<sup>26</sup>

(b) Good listening involves giving the other person your undivided attention. "Whenever possible you should stop whatever you are doing and concentrate on what the other person is saying. Communicate the impression that your relationship to one another is more important than anyone or anything else" (Mack).<sup>27</sup> "Many men seem to have a cloud around their heads that keeps them from hearing what their wives are saying, because they are so preoccupied with and distracted by 'more important things.' They nod and smile and use a variety of verbal and nonverbal affirmations as their wives wax eloquent about some matter that is important to them" (Priolo).<sup>28</sup>

(c) Good listening involves making sure you really understand what the other person is saying or thinking. "What we think they mean and what they do mean may sometimes be two different things. Fairness demands that before we put the worst possible interpretation on what someone says, we ought to do some checking. We ought to ask some questions" (Mack)<sup>29</sup>

Inherent in the whole communication-listening dynamic is the necessity to try to see things from the other person's point of view. To see things from the other person's perspective may require repeating what he has said back to him until he is satisfied that you do understand. Or it may involve asking him kindly to say it in a different or amplified way until you are sure you understand.<sup>30</sup>

3. *Its promotion.* Good communication takes work. (1) Welcome communication. That is, create a comfortable environment that welcomes open communication. Ensure that your spouse believes you enjoy talking with them. "Your wife will probably enjoy revealing herself to you more when she senses that you enjoy the process of verbal interaction" (Priolo).<sup>31</sup> Never give your wife (spouse) the impression that you are not interested in her. Even if this means you must exercise self-control and self-sacrifice.

(2) Initiate communication. Take the initiative to speak to your spouse about mundane as well as important topics. Lou Priolo suggested ten topics for husbands to use in initiating conversations with their wives: Bible doctrine, the home, the children, your (or her) job, her (or your) extended family, her (or your) friends, her (or your) ministries (inside and outside the home), her (or your) goals for the future, specific ways you can be a better husband and father, and things you do that bother her.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 69

<sup>26</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 77-78

<sup>27</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 71

<sup>28</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 78

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 71

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Mack, *Strengthening your Marriage*, 72

<sup>31</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 55

<sup>32</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband*, 57-64