

## Pre-Marital and Marital Christian Pastoral Counseling #2

Pastor Alfonso O. Espinosa

### **Resisting Satan's Assaults Against Holy Matrimony:**

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:6-9)

Because marriage is from God and because He has made it holy, those who are married in Christ are attacked by the evil one who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour. Satan seeks to destroy everything that is good. Marriage is the epitome of what is good among men, because it reflects God's relationship to His Church. The evil one's attacks come in many forms, but the two that seem most cited when marital difficulties develop are these:

- 1) We can't talk anymore/we don't talk any more.
- 2) We cannot manage our financial debts.

These marital maladies make sense from a spiritual perspective: it is just like Satan to go after the things the Lord commends as blessings for marriage: uplifting one another through the power of our words and keeping each other and marriage free from evil desire, greed and the lust of the world.

The roaring lion desires to take these gifts and pervert them so as to disrupt the peace of those who become one in Christ. He therefore strategizes on how to sabotage your communication and your way of living in relation to the world. Look at these in terms of Satan's *internal assault* and his *external assault*. In this issue I will expound on the internal and leave the external for issue #3.

He will try to destroy your marriage internally by attacking your communication. St. James the first pastor of the Jerusalem Church writes, "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell...From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." (James 3:5b,6 & 10)

When it comes to communication things can get out-of-hand quickly and the damage spreads as wildfire! The symptoms of sick communication in marriage include these:

- 1) Holding back true feelings because we don't want to "upset" the other person. That is, we avoid conflict by stifling good communication. When this happens we are really saying that we are no longer interested in the relationship advancing. We might try to convince ourselves that we're being noble and considerate, but this is a cover-up for relational indolence. None of this disregards the wisdom of Proverbs warning against the unnecessary proliferation of words.

Indeed, using few words are praised and the one who listens is at an advantage. This wisdom includes letting go of little offenses without aggravating re-visitation. What I am speaking of, however, is when we really ought to share our thoughts, but shy away for the wrong reasons.

- 2) Letting out sharp barbs of criticism, giving vent to frustration and anger and putting this into words that are unkind, mean, cruel and/or insulting. When wives do this they are known as curs; when men do this they are labeled abusers. Either way, we destroy the relationship. The Proverbs teach that the fool gives full vent to his anger.
- 3) Expressing anger by shutting down. "I don't want to talk about it!" or "Never mind!" translates into, "I have entered passive aggressive mode and my aim is to retaliate by punishing you through ceasing interaction." This sin of omission is often justified by our convincing ourselves that the alternative would not be good or productive. Again, we keep the Proverbs in mind and appreciate that there is a time and a place to allow love to cover over a multitude of sins (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:8). When silence is motivated by anger, however, we enter into unhealthy mind-games.
- 4) We don't listen. We forget that even more important than:
  - a. our actual words;
  - b. the way in which we speak those words;
  - c. and our body language and gestures complementing the words -- and these three elements are all vital --

but our listening is even more important. One may be extremely effective in getting their point across, but simply refuse to be still, shut-up and listen to the other person with undivided attention. When we refuse to listen to the other person, we say that their views are not really relevant or important. When communication is strained, the first thing that seems to go down the drain is actual listening. To compensate during stressful communication, go out of your way to restate what your beloved has said. Use such techniques as, "What I hear you saying is [provide a basic paraphrase and summary]. Am I understanding you correctly?" This is also disarming in the midst of tension, because your use of language that emphasizes your own hearing and your own understanding puts more on you and less on your spouse.

Finally, think of communication in terms of your communication to the Father as guiding our communication to the rest of the family of God (like our spouse). That is, when we pray to God, we appreciate this variety:

A doration

C onfession

T hanksgiving

## S application

That is, while maintaining the principle that God alone receives prayer, we learn something in terms of our communication towards one another:

1. The Christian spouse should emphasize praise towards their beloved. Philippians 4 says that we ought to highlight things in these categories: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, [talk] about these things.”
2. The Christian spouse is led by the Holy Spirit to live in God-generated humility. We do this as we live in a state of confession to one another. I’ve mentioned James 5:16 a few times already. Confess your sins one to another and you will be healed! What a promise! When we share our weakness in marriage and ask for our spouse’s forgiveness, encouragement and acceptance, it keeps us tender, it keeps us strong.
3. The Christian spouse is quite simply always looking to thank their spouse for anything and everything that represents acknowledgement and appreciation of everything they are and everything they do in gifting you with their companionship and love. This companionship and love is expressed in a multitude of ways, we should strive to thank our spouse for all of these things. These words are fantastically affirming and motivating.
4. The Christian spouse should not shy from showing neediness. God says to us in regards to our relationship with Him, “you have not because you ask not.” Not that we’re trying to be a pain, but we should admit how much we desire the favors and the special gifts of our spouse. Ask away! Let them know that you value what they have to offer, their special abilities and gifts – whenever received – are a great blessing and your spouse will be constantly reminded that you must indeed believe they are special. Otherwise you wouldn’t be asking!

Finally, use your words to defend and speak well of your spouse to everyone else. Never complain or reveal the shortcomings of your spouse to anyone else, unless you agree to work constructively with your pastor or professional counselor.

Once again, in Issue #3 I will expound on the external attack.

In your service & to Christ’s glory,

Pastor Espinosa

