



# The Biblical Principles for Solving Marital Conflicts in the Home

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## 1. PREAMBLE

Olutola (2013:473) notes, “conflict is a phenomenon created by man due to differences in goals, interests, wants, needs and outcome of issues. Individuals, families, churches, ministries and organizations, whether Religious or secular, none is exempted in conflict but the outcome of any conflict determines its effect.” Church conflict has constituted a great challenge to the church which has either caused the expansion of the Church or a schismatic instrument in dividing the church. In *The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook* (2002:187), it is important to know that “marriage is the most serious long-term contract a couple will make in their lifetime, but many may enter into it with a lack of maturity and knowledge. It is imperative that young people be adequately prepared for marriage.”

There is one fact that is very glaring in this relationship, that, when two lives are bonded together in a long-term intimate relationship, there are bound to be problems. Many couples go into marriage with very little or no preparation. The *(Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook: 2002: 192)* added, “sometimes they lack the emotional maturity, stability, or flexibility which a successful union must have.” However, this study focuses on the following; first, definition of terms, second, marriage before and after the fall, third, effect of the fall, fourth, possible reason(s) for marriage, fifth, objectives for conflict resolution, sixth, causes for marital conflicts, seventh, the biblical approach to conflict resolution.

## 2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

### A. Marriage

According to Kunhiyop (2008:191) “Marriage is defined as a play in which everyone in the family become an actor or actress and not just someone standing and watching.” Watkins (ed.) (1992: 418) added, “marriage is a ceremony by which a man and woman become husband and wife. Douglas (ed.) (1987:624) stress, “marriage as saying that; it is the formalization and sanctification of the union of man and woman for the procreation of children.” Also, Fleming (2004:280) believes that, “marriage is an unselfish giving of each partner to the other in a union that excludes all others.” Finally, Thomas (2000: 23) agree with Fleming (2004:280) that, “marriage is the merciless revealer, the great white searchlight turned on the darkest places of human nature.” Therefore, it can be summarized that, marriage is a demonstration of love, trust and agreement between a man and a woman to live together for the rest of their lives.

### B. Conflict

There are many definitions to the term “conflict.” But for the sake of this research, Awojobi (2002:96) defined conflict as a “disagreement or opposition or it is to fight a person or thing.” Watkins (1992:129) emphasized, “it means to be in opposition to another or each other, to disagree.” There is no unanimity among the scholars about what constitute a conflict. Because of the pervasive nature of this phenomenon, the term conflict has attracted quite a lot of definitions. Therefore, Olutola (2013:475) concluded that, “conflict is a hallmark of the church and it is birthmark. This assertion shows that conflict is inescapable, inevitable and it is a trait in the church that we cannot do without because it is inborn.”

### **3. MARRIAGE BEFORE THE FALL: GARDEN WAS A PLACE OF**

- a.) Joy-Genesis 3:8
- b.) Fellowship-Genesis 3:8
- c.) Man and woman were co-rulers
- d.) Man and woman were having dominion over the living creatures on earth (Genesis 1:28-30).
- e.) Man and woman were made to be partners
- f.) Roles meant to complete and work together
- g.) Needs drew them to God
- h.) Differences accepted and enjoyed
- i.) God Himself met their needs
- j.) Wife a helper and partner
- k.) Expressed their thoughts, feelings and desires to one another
- l.) Marriage is a picture of God's relationship with His people, Peterson (1977:5).

### **4. MARRIAGE AFTER THE FALL**

Sin has radically scared our existence. As a result of the fall, I will labor with difficulty and pain (Genesis 3:17-19). Even an unusually good marriage is unable to completely erase the effects of sin's curse on individuals and on society. Thomas (2000: 67-68) write, "We must never be naïve enough to think of marriage as a safe harbor from the fall. . . The deepest struggles of life will occur in the most primary relationship affected by the Fall: marriage." Now listen to what happen after the fall of man;

- 1.) The garden became a hiding place (Genesis 3:8)
- 2.) The garden became a fearful place (Genesis 3:10), Thomas (2000: 67-68).

### **5. EFFECTS OF THE FALL-GENESIS 3:16**

Thomas (2000:67-68) narrates what God told the woman of the new relationship that would exist between them, namely;

- a.) Her longings always would be towards her husband to please him. That is, her thoughts, emotions, and satisfactions would be directed toward her husband
- b.) God told the man that he "will rule over her"
- c.) The husband would have the final say in family decisions-making
- d.) The man would be held responsible and accountable in leading and guiding her course of life
- e.) Because of Adam's original sin-the ground which once bore only beautiful and nourishing plants now produces both good and bad alike
- f.) Man, who once had but to walk in the Garden and reach out his hand for food, who had no need for clothing or for shelter, must now toil all the days of his life to provide these necessities for himself and his Family-Genesis 3:17
- g.) Woman, once the most carefree of creatures, is now burdened with sorrow and pain; and both man and woman are under penalty of spiritual and physical Death-Genesis 3:16.

### **6. GOD'S PURPOSE(S) FOR CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

#### **6.1. The Idea of Male and Female was God's Idea-Genesis 1:27.**

Genesis 1 declares the fact of man's creation while Genesis 2 reveals the process by which this occurred. Here in the first chapter we find the fundamental truth that is so essential to the appreciation of marriage-which God made male and female for His own good purposes. It seems too obvious to mention, but perhaps it should be pointed out that the creation of two kinds of people-men and women-was not a dark conspiracy to thwart the ambitions of the woman's liberation movement.

Wheat and Perkins (eds.) (1980:24-25) states, “It was scarcely a put-down for women. Indeed, it became a testimonial, for creation was incomplete without woman. In a loving, amazing, creative act, the almighty God conceived the wonderful mysteries of male and female, masculinity and femininity, to bring joy into our lives.”

Wheat and Perkins (eds.) (1980:25) observes and challenge humanity to think how colorless, how one-dimensional a world would be in which there was only one sex. Who would want to live in an all-male world or an all-female world? Or, for that matter, in a unisex world where all signs of gender were ignored or suppressed? The person who refuses to see and rejoice in the fundamental differences between male and female will never taste the divine goodness God planned for marriage.

Therefore, Fuller (1996:20) emphasized, man and woman together were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). This means that both of them have the dignity and worth of a creature made in God’s image. In Genesis 2, we see that God made woman because man needed her. She was created from his own body as a part of himself, and he recognized her as such. From this the Genesis passage makes the application that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife as one flesh. This means a man must make his wife more important in his life than his parents. It also shows that monogamy was God’s real intention for man.

### **6.2. Marriage was Designed by God to Meet the first Problem of the Human race: Loneliness, Genesis 2:18-22.**

Picture this one man in a perfect environment, but alone. He had the fellowship of God and the company of birds and animals. He had an interesting job, for he was given the task of observing, categorizing, and naming all living creatures. But he was alone. God observed that this was “not good.” So a wise and loving Creator provided a perfect solution. He made another creature, like the man and yet wondrously unlike him. She was taken from him, but she complemented him. She was totally suitable for him—spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and physically. According to God, she was designed to be his “*helper*.” Wheat & Perkins (eds.) (1980:25-26) stresses, “This term helper refers to a beneficial relationship where one person aids or supports another person as a friend and ally.” Perhaps you have thought of a helper as a subordinate, a kind of glorified servant. You will see the woman’s calling in a new light when you realize that the same Hebrew word for help is used of God Himself in Psalm 46:1 where He is called our helper, “a very present help in trouble.”

### **6.3. Marriage was Planned and Decreed to Bring Happiness, not Misery -Genesis 2:23.**

Here is the world’s first love song. Adam was expressing a tremendous excitement, a joyous astonishment. “At last, I have someone corresponding to me.” His phrase, “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” became a favorite Old Testament saying to describe an intimacy, personal relationship. But the fullness of its meaning belongs to Adam and his bride. Wheat & Perkins (eds.) (1980: 26) makes the interesting suggestion that “the Hebrew word for woman, *ishshah*, may come from a root word meaning “to be soft”—an expression, perhaps, of the delightful and novel femininity of woman. So, when the Lord brought the woman to Adam, the man expressed his feelings in words like these: ‘I have finally found the one who can complete me, who takes away my loneliness, who will be as dear to me as my own flesh. She is so beautiful. She is perfectly suited to me. She is all I will ever need,’ (Genesis 2:23). Therefore, marriage was designed for our joy and our happiness. God’s purpose for marriage has never changed, Wheat & Perkins (eds.) (1980: 27).

### **6.4. Unity**

The desire for oneness or unity is deepened and rooted in Genesis 2:24 with its instance that a man and his wife become “one flesh.” This unity was upheld by Jesus in Matthew 19: 3-6. If we want to see and know the reason why both the man and woman get married, then take a look at Africa. Both are considered incomplete without being married. One is respected and considered a man and woman when you are married. The unity or oneness is best understood when man and woman come together as husband and wife. The very idea of an unmarried man or woman is inconceivable in most traditional African societies, Wheat & Perkins (eds.) (1980: 26).

### 6.5. Companionship

Wheat & Perkins (eds.) (1980: 26) has expressed as follows, “The wish and desire for two persons to be together is also rooted in the creation ordinance where God states, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him’ (Gen. 2:18).” Today in Africa, anybody that is not married is regarded as a lonely, miserable and helpless person since he or she is not hook to someone. According to *Shepherding the Flock*, (n. d.: 24) agree that “marriage is imperative if one is to have companionship, love, respect and dignity.” Therefore, it is clear to know that God ordained marriage as a lifelong and exclusive union of a man and woman to enrich one another (Genesis 2: 18-24), to fulfill mutual longings for intimacy (1 Cor. 7: 1-5; Heb. 13: 4), and to provide a godly home as the proper setting for the procreation and nurturing of children (Psalm 127, 128).

### 6.6. Procreation

Kunhiyop (2008: 191) stress “God gave instruction or command to man in Genesis 1:28, to ‘be fruitful and increase in number.’ Also in Psalm 127:3-5 man is to celebrate the joy of having a large family—a joy that Africans share.”

### 6.7. Curbing Fornication and Adultery

Kunhiyop (2008: 191) states, “In 1 Corinthians 7: 1-2, Paul advises marriage as a protection against sexual immorality.” Marriage is the solution to fornication and adultery problems. This is why the purpose for marriage is to help the singles to avoid fornication (sexual immorality). The scriptures encourage every man to have his own wife, and every woman her husband (1 Cor. 7:2). Again we are encouraged to marry because it is better to marry than to burn with sexual passion (1 Cor. 7:9). Finally, when we are married, it does not give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully against us (1 Tim. 5:14) (Lee 2007: 269).

## 7. OBJECTIVES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- 1.) Commit to the process of reconciliation and conflict resolution
- 2.) Understand and apply God’s pattern for reconciliation and conflict resolution
- 3.) Know how to offer and receive forgiveness, *The Mission of an Evangelist* (2001:357).

The purpose of marriage according to the Bible (Genesis 2: 18; Eph. 5:25) is rarely acknowledged in some homes. Instead, O’Donovan (2000:50) stress, “many Christians follow cultural norms that teach that marriage exists simply to satisfy male sexual desires and to produce children for the continuation of the tribe or clan.”

## 8. CAUSES FOR MARITAL CONFLICTS

The writer wishes to bring out two major foundational truths about marriage. If these truths are understood, then conflicts coming from marital homes will be properly managed.

- a.) In Genesis 1:26-28, it states that both the man and the woman were created in God’s image. This affirms the dignity of both sexes. Human beings are the zenith of creation; men and women are uniquely blessed by God, (Anderson 2000:155).
- b.) Genesis 2: 18-25 asserts several truths that are applicable to the marriage union.
  - i. The woman was fashioned from the fiber of the man, and she was created as an equal but also as a helper for him
  - ii. God affirms the marital union by commanding that couples are to leave their parents The priorities are changed; a new family is to be formed
  - iii. The couple is to cleave together and become one flesh, an affirmation of the sexual union in marriage. But it is to be much more than simply a sexual union; it is to be a holistic union, a union of the total person, both material and immaterial, a “oneness,” (Anderson 2000: 155).

### 9. CAUSES FOR MARITAL CONFLICTS

Conflicts often arise between parents, parents and their children at home. Because of such conflicts, a communication barrier may develop. Parents find it difficult to talk things over with their children or within themselves. They delay explanations of crucial physical and mental changes, especially in the areas of sex and reproduction. Controls are tightened by the parents and their children fights even harder for independence. The gap widens; they become antagonists-and the battle goes on. It is also observed that, rebellion, waywardness, lack of discipline, confusion, and conflict prevents happy relationships within the home, *The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook* (2002:155).

Awojobi (2002:97) observes, "Individual differences among couple can cause conflict. Our temperaments are not the same. Peoples' reaction to issues differs." Oderinde (1993:72) agree with Awojobi that, "Incompatibility of the couples may be one of the family problems. This is a situation whereby couples are opposite of each other in all circumstances. Loneliness is another problem e.g. a husband whose job requires touring and takes much of his time out of the family. Self-centeredness or egocentrism is indisputably another area of conflict in the family.

Awojobi (2002:72-73) added, "Childlessness in the family can cause conflict. This is because not everybody can endure sterility for it brings nothing but sadness to the family. The negative influence of in-laws can cause conflict. Witchcraft, if the woman is a witch, she will cause problems and embarrassment for the husband and the entire family because she is a stain to that family. O'Donovan (2000:83) also observed that, other area that can possibly cause conflict in a family include disagreements over money, unfulfilled sexual relationships, over extended family responsibilities, couple cheating on one another, Dali (2001:70-73) emphasizes, "selfishness in terms of the man caring only for his parents, drunkenness and lack of self-control, Unforgiveness and anger." Finally, Talitwala (2008: 17-18) agree with Dali, "frustrations will affect our relationships. The main cause of frustration is unmet expectations whether they are right or wrong." We tend to get frustrated when we put our happiness in the promise of things or in the hands of other people. Frustrations can also arise from unrealistic expectations of others.

### 10. THE BIBLICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As Christians we feel that we should not have conflicts because we believe in God. This kind of belief is not correct and can cause us a lot of problems and even complicate issues. Talitwala (2008:48) further stated, "We need to consistently remember that despite being Christians we are human and still bear marks of a fallen nature. We are created with a longing to be in relationships even though we are not perfect." The first text is a record of the teaching of the Lord Jesus Himself. He was telling His followers what course of action to take if someone sinned against them. Rather than creating a stir and turning it into a major issue, they were to go to the person immediately and confront him with his wrong (Matthew 18: 15-17). Talitwala (2008:38) believe that "the truth in some forms of conflict are best managed by endurance while others require multiple solutions. It is observed that quick movement towards solutions sometimes can limit success." Below are the steps towards conflict resolutions.

Strauss (2013:3) suggest, we should concentrate our attention on our own faults, thinking first of those areas in which we can improve ourselves. Our own self-will and pride are invariably responsible for part of the conflict. It may have been the little demands we made of our mates for our own convenience. It may have been the indifference we showed toward our mates' needs. It may have been the coolness we experienced because our feelings were hurt. All of this is selfish pride, and all of it helped intensify the conflict. Whenever there is a conflict, pride is the cause, and each of us is usually guilty of some of that pride. We need to admit it. Once we acknowledge our sin of pride, God bestows both forgiveness and renewed marital harmony. In *Shepherding the Flock*, (n. d.:18) God does not expect us to be passive in the presence of conflict. He encourages the art of gracious disagreement. Like iron sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17), friends test one another's ideas against the standard of the Word of God. When conflict arises, God has told us how to take initiative in the case of irritations. He says, before trying to "judge" a speck in your brother's eye, check your own eye for a "log" of pride or hypocrisy in your own life (Matthew 7: 1-5).

Strauss (2013:3) added "When we are in the middle of a marital crisis we usually feel that our problems would be solved if only our mates would change their ways. We never really change others

for the better by carping, criticizing, and complaining. We must give our attention to the one thing that we can change by God's grace and power-ourselves! God does not expect us to improve our mates; He expects us to provide for their needs. When we improve ourselves, our marriages will also begin to improve." Below is the biblical approach to conflict resolutions.

a. We should learn to forgive completely our mates' faults

The following is the observation of Strauss (2013:3-4) that it's hard to forgive when our mates have not apologized. The only way to rid ourselves of those hard feelings is to forgive our mates fully for every offense that they have committed against us. There is no indication that the person who was wronging Peter ever apologized for it, yet Christ told him to forgive as many as 490 times. He was teaching that there is actually no end to forgiveness. "Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive them, he will not forgive you,"(Matthew 6:16). At first sight this would seem to teach that our own forgiveness is based on our forgiveness of others, instead of on God's grace in Christ. When we grant forgiveness, resentment and bitterness disappear and our harsh and intolerant attitudes are replaced with genuine love and concern for our mates.

Strauss (2013:4-5) gives advice to men, that they must openly and frankly apologize to our mates for our part of the blame. It is a mistake to try to apologize before we have acknowledged our own guilt and forgiven our mates for theirs. Only after our hearts have been set right before the Lord can we offer a genuine apology. Open and sincere admission of guilt is a powerful healing force. Some men think that admitting guilt is a sign of weakness. Actually, however, it is a sign of spiritual and emotional strength-a mark of a healthy, well-balanced person. Some insist that it would be hypocritical to apologize, since they will probably do the same thing again. But God says that we are to confess our faults to each other. Refusal is disobedience to Him. Even if we have deeply hurt, to admit our part of the blame in unselfish and forgiving love will make it easier for our mates to admit theirs. No matter how minor our fault is, we ought to focus our attention on that and frankly apologize for it. God will then use our selfless spirit to resolve our marital conflicts.

b. Confront lovingly

In *Church conflicts*, (1982:16-17) when a brother or sister wrongs us, we need to go to that person. Although some Christians say this won't work, it does usually take care of the problem. A one-to-one encounter, in an attitude of humility and love, this will bring many offenders to repentance and confession. It keeps a tiny spark from becoming an inferno. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus said, "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault" (v. 15a). Here, an individual believer is to go and discuss with his fellow believer in resolving the conflict between them through dialogue. Gabriel (2013:482) stress, "This dialogue involves clearly exposing brother his sin so that he is aware of it and calling him to repentance. If the sinning brother repents in response to the private dialogue, then the brother is forgiven and relationship is restored." Gabriel (2013:482) added yet the same Matthew 18: 15, Jesus says, "And if your brother sins; go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." "The Greek word translated 'won' was originally used for accumulating wealth in the sense of monetary commodities. Here it refers to the gaining back of something of value that is lost, namely, an erring brother. When there is conflict between two brothers, a valuable treasure is lost which is the love that existed between them, and the church should not be content until the conflict is resolved."

Therefore, in *Shepherding the Flock*, (n. d. 18-19) "the individual is encouraged to go to the one who has injured you. Do not talk around to gain allies. Apply damage control by trying to limit the knowledge of the problem." In *The Mission of an Evangelist*, (2001:357), "This first step is a commitment to go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift (see Matthew 5: 23-24). Settle it first before worship. Take the first step to mend the problem."

c. Bring one or two witnesses

In *Church conflicts*, (1982:17) that understanding is, "If a personal encounter fails, Christ said, you need to go to the offender with two or three respected fellow believers. It might be a good idea to take along a lay leader who has been successful in helping other people. The presence of godly people will often lead to repentance and forgiveness, bringing the problem to an end." In Matthew 18: 16, the

purpose of taking other believers is “so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. In order words, the witnesses are present not only to confirm that the issue of dispute between both parties but to act as mediators in resolving the conflict. Gabriel (2013:483) underscore the fact, “The presence of additional witnesses is to act as neutral third party in addressing the root-cause(s) of the conflict by moderating discussions, assisting and finding solution to the prevailing conflict. These witnesses must be neutral, credible and be respected by both parties. At this point it is assumed that the presence of the witnesses will be sufficient to resolve the conflict and restore back the relationship between brothers.” Finally, in *Shepherding the Flock*, (n. d.:19) states clearly, “The reason for two or three persons going with you is to hear both sides of the issue and to increase the pressure on the other party. If the person still does not respond, and if your witnesses agree that you have been seriously wronged. . .”

### d. Go before the Church

Also, in *Church conflicts* (1982:17-18) additional step is provided to solve the conflict. If the first two steps in Matthew 18 did not solve the problem, only then should the third step be taken. “Because the issue is not resolved, the church leaders must act. They may even be forced to ask the congregation to remove an unrepentant person from the membership. The goal of forgiveness and restoration should be kept before everyone. This is done through prayer and an attitude of love and humility.” Gabriel (2013:483) notes, in Matthew 18:17a, we see the church being invited into the matter so that; the church in this context is to decide and neutralize the conflict according to God’s standard. At this stage, conflicting parties will present their grievances and the steps that have been taken so far in resolving the conflict. Thus, the church has the final say on the disputing issues in which the decision taken will be binding on the parties.

### e. Follow-up with Compassion

According to Gabriel (2013:483), he has further demonstrated that, “In Matthew 18: 17b, if the church decides you are, but the other person won’t accept it, treat that person as a pagan or corrupt tax-collector. A pagan is a non-Jew who held to the traditional paganism and had no part in the covenant, worship, or social life of the Jews. Jesus’ use of these terms does not mean that the church is to treat these people badly.” It simply means that when a professing believer refuses to accept the decision of the church, he is to be treated as if he was outside of the fellowship. They are not to let him associate and participate in the blessings and benefits of the Christian assembly. In *Church conflicts*, (1982:22), this is a strong suggestion to the church, “The whole process must be bathed in prayer and carried out with Christian love. This follow-up is necessary because the people involved may be left wounded and feel alienated. They need a tender, caring ministry, there has to be a compassionate follow-up.”

## 11. BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS IN MARRIAGE UNION

### Jesus, the Model of Forgiveness

David (1970:19) notes that, our Lord Jesus practiced to the fullest whatever He commanded us. Whether it is carrying the cross, loving others, showing mercy to others, caring for the poor and the sick, welcoming and accommodating sinners e.t.c, our Lord Jesus is a perfect example of what he demands from us. Where else can we find an example of forgiveness if not from our Lord Himself. Our Lord forgave the adulterous woman her sins (John 8:1-11); he called sinners to follow him (Matthew 9:9-13); he allowed a sinful woman to kiss him and wipe his feet with her hair (Luke 7:36-50), and so on. But on the cross, our Lord forgave those who killed him: “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Our Lord opened the gates of paradise to the good thief who was crucified with him. He said to Jesus, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’ (Luke 23:42). Jesus said to him in reply: “In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

David (1970:19) again observed, Stephen, the first martyr, followed the example of our Lord by forgiving those who stoned him to death: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Oftentimes we find it difficult to forgive, and that is understandable. However, let us know that Jesus suffered worse things and yet forgave those who killed him. Hence, we should in our prayer pray to the Lord Jesus for the grace to forgive. But when we deliberately refuse to forgive, it becomes harder for us to receive the grace to forgive. And when we do not forgive, we ourselves are not free as we

continue to carry in our hearts and souls the effects of the injury done to us. The scripture enjoins us to forgive as Christ has forgiven us, “Bear with one another, forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same (Col 3:13). Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ” (Eph. 4:32).”

McDowell & Lewis(eds) (1981:80-81) agree with David that, “In the Gospel of Matthew 18:21-22), Christ talks about forgiveness. When Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone, Jesus says not seven times but seventy times seven. The multiplied answer of 490 is not important; it is the principle of the thing.” Forgive a person until you have lost count. An unforgiving heart causes bitterness. The longer you are unforgiving, the longer this “root of bitterness” will grow in you until finally it consumes you. And that will destroy you as well as your relationship with those around you. Learn to forgive those that have hurt you. God wants you to forgive them anyhow. Nowhere in Scripture does it say, “Only forgive them if they come to you; otherwise, do not forgive them at all.” At this point, your forgiveness benefits you more than it does them. It frees you from bitterness to partake of God’s abundant life.

In *The Billy Graham Worker’s Handbook*, (2002:124) encourage forgiveness of those who have offended or hurt. This is difficult, but God commands it. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. We are advised to forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13). Sometimes those who deserve forgiveness the least need it the most. Forgiving as the Lord forgave implies forgetting. This is difficult and may require time, but God can change our attitudes. Therefore, Jesus’ answer of “seventy times seven” to Peter’s question, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” implies that the Christian must be ready, even eager, to forgive (Matthew 18:21-35).

LaHaye & Philips, (eds) (1982:109-110) quoted Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), an American preacher who once said, “‘I can forgive, but I cannot forget’ is only another way of saying, ‘I will not forgive.’ Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note, torn in two, and burned up, so it never can be shown against one.” Beecher’s thoughts were later modified by others to express, “If you have not really forgotten, then you have not truly forgiven.” In Jeremiah 31:34, it says . . . Declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” The concept that God wants to convey is not that the event or sin itself is forgotten, but that judgment for the offense is removed. In other words, “I will not hold it against them in judgment anymore.” Have you ever wondered why forgiveness is so difficult? It is basically because the person who is hurt (the offended party) does the forgiving and not the person being forgiven (the offender). But Augsburg David addresses this thought in an excellence way as quoted by LaHaye & Philips, (eds) (1982:110-111)when he writes, “The man who forgives pays a tremendous price-the price of the evil he forgives. The fact is in forgiveness; you bear your own anger and wrath at the sin of another. Voluntarily accepting responsibility for the hurt he has inflicted on you.” Also LaHaye & Philips, (eds) (1982:110-111) quoted Myron Augsburg as stated,

To forgive is costly. To forgive . . . is to carry one’s own wrath on the sin of another; the guilty one is released, the offended one frees him, by bearing his own indignation and resolving it in love. God forgives by carrying His own wrath on the sin we have expressed against him. . . He absorbs our guilt and makes us free. Forgiveness goes through the sin to freedom.

Therefore, forgiveness is costly because it is substitutional. As stressed by LaHaye & Philips, (eds) (1982:111-112)“All forgiveness, human and divine, is in the very nature of the case vicarious, substitutional.’ And this is one of the most valuable views that no one ever really forgives another, except he bears the penalty of the other’s sin against him.’ This substitution was perfectly expressed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ substituted Himself for us, bearing His own wrath. His own indignation at our sin. That is what forgiveness costs. Forgiveness is very costly. It costs you, not the person being forgiven.”The church is simply reminded by LaHaye & Philips, (eds) (1982:112) that, forgiveness does not rebuild the house that has been burned down by someone carelessly playing with matches. Forgiveness does not always put a broken marriage back together. Forgiveness does not restore virginity to the rape victim.Odunze (1985:79) agree with LaHaye & Philipsthat, “Couples need to know that; forgiveness, forbearance, tolerance and longsuffering are required on the part of both



husband and wife for the survival of every marriage and home. Marriage is a sacred thing and couples should guide against anything that will destroy their marriages and homes.”

According to Jim (1976:101-102), “To forgive and forget is a big problem to some couples, yes agree that on your own strength, forgiving and forgetting will be hard if not impossible. I believe that the forgetting of things must be left up to God. We all know that time is a healer and time causes us to forget.” As tensions and hurts are erased through seeking forgiveness, I believe we slowly forget the bad things and remember the good. You can always take personal action in the forgiveness realm. As an individual, you will have to trust God and time with the forgetting area. God is in the business of introducing people to new beginnings. His method of doing this is to bring healing and wholeness into lives through struggle and growth. The scripture teaches unlimited forgiveness. In Matthew 18:22 in the New Testament, Jesus states that we forgive “seventy times seven.” That does not mean that God’s forgiveness and ours should be unlimited.

David (1970:31) suggests, “In addition to how one can forgive, get outside your skin. Do not let selfishness blind you and bind you helplessly. Learn to do the following; listen to others, love others, learn to understand, to care, accept God’s scale of values for your own and then put people first. After which, learn to open your life to the flow of God’s forgiving love.” Draw on it, depend on it. Trust God to share it, serve, help, pray, give, go and forgiveness will sprout and grow in your life. The secret is love-love for your brother, love for God, and love even for your enemy. It will work-seventy times seven.

### **Forgiveness involves three steps**

1. Using your free will to make the choice to forgive
2. Deliberately behaving in the manner that the Lord has shown in the Bible to be right
3. Trusting Him to do His part by renewing your mind and giving you knew, transformed attitudes, Wheat & Perkins (1980:197).

### **Steps in Forgiveness-Matthew 18: 15-35**

1. Choosing to forgive
  - a.) To help us make the choice to forgive, the Lord provides an urgent warning in the letter to the Hebrews 12:13-15
  - b.) The one who clings to the misery of an unforgiving spirit will be crippled in the living of life, God warns
  - c.) The word bitterness in the Greek New Testament is *pikrias*, that is, cutting, pricking, puncturing that is at the same time pungent and penetrating

Note: Here are the implications for not forgiving as suggested by Wheat & Perkins (1980:198);

- a.) It vividly communicates the sensations of torture to yourself and your loved ones when you refuse to forgive your mate
  - b.) Radio Bible teacher Charles Swindoll has suggested that it is like locking yourself in a concentration camp of your own making
  - c.) Corrie Ten Boom describes it as sitting in a very dark room in the daytime with heavy draperies closing off the sunlight and fresh air
  - d.) When you choose to forgive your husband or wife totally and wholeheartedly for any and all wrongs, you will find yourself entering the “Kingdom of love.”
2. Changing your Behavior-Ephesians 4:31-32

Note: key words from the passage above

- a.) Be kind
- b.) Be tenderhearted
- c.) Be forgiving

Below are the implications of the passage above as also addressed by Wheat & Perkins (1980: 198-199).

- a.) The essence of kind treatment of your partner is to treat him or her precisely as you want to be Treated-Matthew 7:12
- a.) If you show kindness to your mate;
  - i.) You will never use the past against him or her-1 Corinthians 13:5
  - ii.) You will never talk about it again either to him or to anyone else
  - iii.) You will never dwell on it in your thoughts. Remember, God has forgiven you for many sins far worse than what your mate has committed
- b.) When authentic forgiveness takes place, your behavior will change. It must change
- c.) To forgive is to say good-bye forever to the pain of the past and to be rid of its effects in the present
3. Renewing your Mind-Lamentation 3:22-23; Romans 12:1-2
  - b.) Now is the time to forget the past and move into the future. The question: How is it possible? The answer to this question is that, as you allow God to do His part by renewing your mind through the Word of God, thus replacing the negatives with good attitudes that will bless your marriage relationship
  - c.) The ability to leave the past behind belongs to God's people
  - d.) The Christian life is all present and Future-Philippians 3:13
  - e.) Remember, forgiveness can begin as a unilateral action, that is, seeking for forgiveness should begin with you
  - f.) If you are feeling bitterly disappointed in your mate, that attitude also is a signal that you need to choose to forgive
  - g.) If or when you are ready to forgive and let go of your negative attitudes, God will be more than ready to heal you and renew your love for each other.

## 12. CONCLUSION

This research has helped the writer having investigated and discovered the root-causes of conflicts between couple, parent and their children; this is a way forward both for the couples, church and the society at large. Conflict resolution implies approaching the conflict in a problem-solving, constructive and non-violent way, recognizing the values of the identities of all parties in the relationship, their human needs and interests, rather than a violent, destructive solution or a mere settlement that 'freezes' the current power distribution between opponents. According to Olutola (2013:476), conflict resolution is an "effort, processes and approaches aim at ending or resolving a conflict. The resolution is borne out of the belief that conflict cannot be left alone. It needs to be put under control by interacting with the parties to develop common generalization or principles and practices that will return cordial relationship against violence." Olutola (2013:483) desire that, the church should be an epitome of peace, unity and manager and resolver of conflict. Family conflict is normal. Dali (2001:74-75) quoted Jill Briscoe in her book, *Fight for the family: A Plan for Rebuilding the Family* stated that:

Conflict is normal half the problem when war is declared and battle commences, whether it be an argument in the bedroom, living room, or even the use of the bathroom is that Christians are only human! We have feelings like everyone else, and most of us find it harder to be Christians at home than anywhere else on earth.

Dali (2001:75-76) stress, "we must be prayerful because there is no more effective weapon for Christians as they seek to resolve family conflicts than the weapon of prayer. Through intercession, we can bring the Prince of Peace into the scene of hostilities. Prayer with fasting and reading the Word of God can change our attitude and we can handle our anger and conflict without it leading to divorce." In *The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook*, (2002,187) couples are advised, they

need to understand that a good marriage is based on respect for oneself and for the partner. A poor self-image, inherited from a stressful home background or the product of immaturity, can lead to stormy seas. A solid relationship with Jesus Christ and an understanding of oneself in the light of that relationship are very important. A poor understanding of each other can also lead to misunderstanding and conflict. It doesn't take too much discernment to realize that males and females are different physically.

Also in *The Mission of an Evangelist* (2001: 357) on the positive side, a conflict provides an opportunity for you to glorify God. We read that in 1 Corinthians 10: 31-33 and 1 Peter 2: 12. It is an opportunity to build others up and to grow in Christ's likeness. James talks of trials and pressures developing in us the quality of perseverance and maturity. As couple the challenge is before us to look for new ways to resolve old problems. Oderinde (1993:74) notes, "We must understand that to deal successfully with repeated incidents of quarrels and fighting that this emanating from anger and depression. This requires the partners to take the risk of finding out what is really causing them this anger, then, seek ways to deal with the anger in their lives."

Oderinde (1993:74) alluded, the couple is encouraged to have a mutual dialogue between them. It is observed that when dialogue takes place, the two people communicate the full meaning of their lives to one another. Therefore, couples that understand and accept changes in their lives, they are seen to be properly equipped to cope with the increasingly complex lives most of us lead. Finally, Talitwala(2008:28-29)emphasized, "the most important arms of a genuine relationship are confrontation with truth and affirmation with love. It is said that we grow most rapidly when supported with that arm of loving respect, then confronted with the arm of clear honesty."

Confrontation here is the ability to point out the inconsistencies in another, in a gentle loving way. For example, being able to point out to the person that: "You say you are not angry but you are speaking with a raised voice and banging the table." When dealing with conflicts we need to remember two important things: Firstly, we are all unique and at different places in our growth and understanding; we have to respect each other's perspectives. Secondly, behind our conflict are the feelings of hurt and anger that will need to be dealt with. Finally, couples are encouraged in the scripture, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly," (Proverbs 15:1-2 NIV).

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