

Four Rules *of* Communication

Good relationships do not come automatically. All of the story plots patterned after fairytales, e.g., Prince Charming riding off into the sunset and living happily ever after, are purely fictional and absolutely unscriptural. Relationships simply never happen that way. They can't. Because we are all sinners, and sinners are selfish. The fact that we are selfish means we are going to have conflicts. James 3:16 says, "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."

But cheer up! Good marriages and good relationships are not built upon an absence of problems. Problems can and must be resolved—God commands it. And for what He has commanded He always gives the means and strength to carry out.

In Ephesians 4:22-32, Paul talks about putting off old ways and putting on Christ's ways. In these verses, he gives us four vital rules for communication to solve problems.

01 Be Honest *v. 25*

In Marriage Relationship, Wayne Mack rightly says that one of the most basic requirements of good communication is mutual openness and honesty. There must be honest listening and speaking if problems are to be resolved.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 2:11; jot down why a person must verbalize his thoughts to another.
2. Honesty is more than not lying. Explain how from verse 25.
3. What can happen when we do not listen or talk honestly?
4. How are we commanded to speak the truth (Eph. 4:15)?

02 Keep Current *v. 26, 27*

1. According to verse 26, is anger in itself a sin?
2. The energy called "anger" is given to attack problems; it is not given to attack people.
 - a. In verses 26 and 27, "clamming up" is destroying whom?
 - b. In Proverbs 25:28, is the person "blowing up" in or out of control?
 - c. Who is hurt by the "blowing up"?
 - d. When you don't deal with problems, to whom do you give a foothold?

03 Attack the Problem, Not the Person *v. 29*

1. "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." True?
2. When you attack someone, who are you really criticizing? (Who created that person?)
3. What kind of voice inflections, tones and non-verbal actions say, "I do not think you are a worthwhile person"?
4. What must be the goal of our words (communications)?
5. How can you do this? Provide examples.

04 Act; Don't React v. 31, 32

Sinful people tend to react. Since the fall of man, we've had a tendency to defend; react rather than respond; blame shift and run.

1. In verse 31, how does Paul describe Genesis 3-type actions? When someone loves us enough to approach us about a need in our life we can always find fault with them, but we'll never solve problems or grow by being a Genesis 3 kind of person.
2. Instead of reacting (v. 32), through Christ's Spirit we must learn to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving.
3. Changing life-long habits is hard, but what do the following verses say?
 - a. 1 Corinthians 10:13 —
 - b. 2 Peter 1:3 —

When we speak of acting to change habits, we mean list steps required to put biblical principle into practice instead. This is what medication is. This is being serious about loving obedience to Christ.

Conclusion

1. Listening and lovingly desiring to communicate to solve problems goes with each rule.
2. A desire to be God's kind of person and to have a right relationship with Him is essential to applying His principles.
3. Below are some questions to ask yourself before bringing up a sticky problem:
 - a. "Do I have the facts right?" (Prov. 18:13)
If not, you need to admit you're not sure.
 - b. "Is the timing right?" (Prov. 15:23b)
 - c. "Is my attitude right?" (Eph. 4:15)
 - d. "Are my words loving?"
 - e. "Have I prayed for God's help?" (Prov. 3:5b)

Additional Reading

- *Your Family God's Way*, Wayne Mack; chapters 4-14
- *Christian Living in the Home*, Jay Adams; chapter 3
- *Marriage Relationships*, Wayne Mack; unit 4
- *Say It With Love*, Howard Hendricks

Monday (v. 1, 2) – *Therefore be imitators of God...* The word translated “imitators” is the Greek word from which we get our English word “mimic.” Paul is saying, “Mimic God, be like God!” Notice the characteristic of God that we are to mimic: “walk in *love*.” This love is, again, “agape love,” the sacrificial, others-oriented love of God. If you desire to be pleasing to God and to grow in your walk with Christ, you will need to continually—and in increasing measure—practice Christ-like sacrificial love.

Tuesday (v. 3, 4) – Again we have a list of sins that should not be present in the life of a believer. Notice Paul says twice that these things are not “fitting”; in other words these things have no place in the life of a Christian. Fornication/uncleanness indicates any kind of sexual sin or immorality; covetousness describes a greedy, self-centered attitude; filthiness indicates shameful obscenity; foolish talking is a compound of two Greek words, one meaning “moron,” “dull” or “stupid,” and the other “to speak” (“don’t babble like a fool”); coarse jesting indicates any sins of the tongue, obscene, degrading, suggestive or immoral speech.

Wednesday (v. 5-7) – Paul says the people who practice the types of sins in verses 3 and 4 “have no inheritance in the kingdom of God.” What do you think he means by that statement? He is talking about habitual life-patterns of immorality, impurity or greed that characterize those who are outside of Christ; he is not so much talking about a way *to* God, but a lifestyle that is *separation from* God. God’s kingdom is one of unblemished holiness, so those who choose filthiness have, by choice, no part in it that kingdom. Again, the point is not to set up a list of rules as a standard of righteousness but to hold God’s holiness up in front of us (believers) and to compare that holiness to the wicked sinfulness of the world; then we are to examine our own lives to see if any of these sinful lifestyle patterns are evident. If they are we need to shun them because we are imitating the lost world, not our Holy God.

Thursday (v. 7-10) – Therefore do not be partakers with them... Verse 7 is the central point to this passage. Some people have an erroneous view of what it means to be “in Christ” (a Christian); some believe, wrongly, that “being saved” is an end to itself. Once you are “saved” you can live life any way you please because your ticket to heaven

is punched. That mentality has placed a significant stumbling block into the path of many unbelievers who find it hard to reconcile the free grace of God with His absolute holiness; in other words they might (and do) say, “If salvation is free you can sin all you want.” It’s a real shame when people name the name of Jesus Christ yet persist in an ungodly lifestyle. The Bible has no such message for us. “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:15, 16) “And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” (Rom. 8:10) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17) “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Pet. 1:15, 16) “...Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Eph. 1:4) If you are a child of God “darkness” should have no place in your life.

Friday (v. 11-13) – Verse 11 echoes verse 7 and is literally: “Do not become a partaker together with.” God’s people cannot run with worldly crowd. Paul also gives us the “put on” principal for this passage: “Expose them.” Notice what we are to expose: “unfruitful works of darkness.” We are called to expose works and not just people. What is the implication of that for your life?

Saturday (v. 14) – The message from verse 14 is crystal clear: Wake up! What a fitting message for the Church of Jesus Christ in America today. What a fitting message for each one of us today, our life here in America is pretty easy, we really have lack for almost nothing. We are even blessed beyond measure in a spiritual sense, multitudes of good books, Bibles, and language helps, and excellent speakers to fill our hearts and minds with biblical truths. It has been said that the average conservative Christian in America has a knowledge of the Bible which far surpasses most pastors in third world countries—yet many of us today are sleepwalking. How can we break out of the spiritual malaise settled on much of the Church today?