

# COVENANT KEEPERS

**“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”**

**Volume 3 - Issue 3**

**Summer Edition**

## **Growing in harmony with your spouse.**

When you first met your spouse, you had a mutual attraction to one another because of certain similarities. Perhaps you met while involved in an activity which seemed to indicate that you had some mutual interests and goals. You dated, fell in love, and married. However, after marriage something changed. You began to see that you also had many differences which created conflicts and division between you. At this point, you began to realize that you needed to make certain adjustments to regain the companionship and unity that you previously enjoyed. One of the greatest desires any married couple has is to experience love, harmony, and real companionship with one another. But, the question is, how can you regain companionship and grow in greater harmony in your relationship? What are some practical steps you can take to reach this goal? Let's look at the general principles that will enable you to find harmony.

There is one principle that stands out and is repeated many times in Scripture: the principle of agreement. To find the harmony you desire you must seek agreement with your mate as the means to the goal of harmony and true companionship in your marriage. With every issue that arises and every decision that is made, God wants you to seek agreement with your spouse. This principle was taught by Paul when he spoke of decision-making in the most intimate aspect of marriage, the sexual union. He said, *“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control”* (1 Cor. 7:5). The word *consent* in this passage means to harmoniously agree.

If Scripture teaches that we are to find harmonious agreement in the most

intimate decision within our relationship, how much more should we seek agreement in the more general areas of our marriage? The pursuit of agreement with your spouse over all of your differences will produce harmony and should be a fundamental goal of your daily relationship together.



***Don't you want this kind of harmony in your marriage?***

This biblical principle of agreement is also a necessity in your relationship with God. The Father revealed this desire when He asked His rebellious people through the prophet Amos, *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* (Amos 3:3). The obvious answer to this question is *no*. We cannot walk with the Father unless we are in agreement with Him. This agreement must begin at the point of salvation as John taught, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). The word *confess* in this passage means to agree with. God requires us to agree with Him concerning our sinful behavior before we can begin to walk with Him.

When we finally yield to God's truth and agree with Him, there is an instant harmony and oneness that results. If harmony is to continue, we must continue to confess and agree with Him throughout our Christian walk.

If you desire harmony and oneness with your spouse, finding agreement is the means to this goal. Without agreement there can be no lasting harmony between you. Therefore, in each of the areas of conflict you are experiencing right now, ask yourself if this is your desire. Are you seeking to find agreement together or are you only seeking your own way? God doesn't want you living in a tumultuous atmosphere but a harmonious one, and finding agreement is the only way to get there.

## **How can you find agreement with each other?**

When you have differences that divide you there is only one way to find agreement and restore the harmony you desire, and that is by finding a compromise with one another. Compromise is achieved when both partners make concessions that enable them to find middle ground.

Some people look at compromise as if it is a dirty word, a violation of some cardinal virtue. Yet, the real question is not *if* you should compromise, but *what* should you compromise. God definitely does not want us to compromise over biblical or moral issues that are clearly revealed in His Word. Scripture is clear that we are to have *“no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness”* (Eph. 5:11). We are commanded not to *“touch the unclean thing”* (2 Cor. 6:17). However, when it comes to non-moral or non-biblical issues, the Bible teaches: *“Let each be fully convinced in his own mind”* (Rom. 14:5). In nonessential issues God gives us the freedom to make up our own minds, but we are also warned not to judge or offend our

**She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14**

brothers by our attitudes, decisions, or lifestyle. Paul said not to *“do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak”* (Rom. 14:21). He declared that if we fail in these things we *“are no longer walking in love”* (Rom. 14:15).

Therefore, if the issues that divide you are not moral or biblical ones, you can and should find agreement through compromise. If, for example, there are two equally moral and valid activities to choose from for an evening out, why not compromise by doing one this week and the other next week? This would show love and consideration for both desires.

But you may be thinking, *what are the practical steps to finding compromise?* It is easy to say that compromise is necessary, but how can you actually find it?

**1. Ask forgiveness.** If there has been a recent conflict with your mate in which your attitudes, words, or actions were offensive, you need to begin the reconciliation process by first going to your spouse and confessing your faults in the matter, and then asking his or her forgiveness. Jesus taught that reconciling with others must take priority even over worshipping God. *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly”* (Matt. 5:23-25).

Why is seeking forgiveness and reconciliation for past conflicts so important to obtaining a compromise over a present issue? It's because you and your spouse must be willing to work together in finding a compromise and this is impossible when there are unresolved issues between you. When you sin against your mate, harmony is broken until you confess it. Asking forgiveness immediately removes the hardness in both hearts and provides an atmosphere for finding compromise. If you want to find agreement and compromise today, begin by making a humble confession, acknowledging your faults of the past. Unconfessed sin will not miraculously go away by itself; it must be admitted. Until this occurs it will always be an underlying issue that will profoundly hinder your relationship.

This truth is illustrated powerfully in the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. They sinned terribly against Joseph by selling him into slavery because they were jealous of his favored relationship with Jacob their father. Yet, God's sovereign hand elevated Joseph from a slave to second in command over Egypt. Ultimately, God brought them all together again and Joseph forgave the evil done to him. Nowhere does it say that Joseph's brothers asked his forgiveness. Years later, after Jacob died, his brothers, fearing that Joseph would now take revenge, finally sent a message, *“I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they indeed did evil to you”* (Gen. 50:17). We don't know why it took them so long to ask Joseph's forgiveness. But what is clear, is that the issue was obviously still bothering them and nagging at their conscience. Their fear was the evidence that failure to confess sin and ask forgiveness will leave the issue unresolved, a hindrance to real relationship.

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### **Without agreement there can be no lasting harmony between you.**

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Do you have any offenses that you have left unconfessed? If so, won't you ask forgiveness today? This is undoubtedly a central reason for having little harmony in your marriage. Don't allow pride and unwillingness to keep you estranged from your spouse for one more day. Don't sugar-coat it with vague generalities of error. Acknowledge specifically what you have done wrong as sin before God and as offensive to your spouse. This will always be the first step in seeking agreement and the compromise you desire.

Now, go back to God in prayer and ask His forgiveness for whatever you have done in word or deed that was displeasing to Him. He is faithful and just to cleanse you from it all.

**2. Choose to lovingly give.** Choosing to lovingly give is also a key ingredient to finding compromise and the agreement you long for in your marriage. In fact, compromise cannot be found unless at

least one partner is willing to take the first step and give in a sacrificial way. When individuals lovingly give they are making the concessions that are necessary for compromise to occur. Giving in this manner will always eliminate strife and restore harmony to the relationship.

Abraham and Lot illustrate this principle well. When strife occurred between these two family members over the issue of grazing land for their large herds, notice the choice Abraham made. He said to Lot, *“Please let there be no strife between you and me...Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left”* (Gen. 13:8,9). This is what compromise is all about. It is seeking a way to give in order to eliminate strife. Compromise may even entail giving your partner the opportunity to make the choice and being willing to abide by his or her decision. Love will always seek a way to give to others in this manner. *“For God so loved...that He gave His only begotten Son,”* in order that He might remove the strife and reconcile us to Himself (John 3:16). Love always takes sacrificial action to reconcile conflict.

How about you? Are you willing to give in this manner to your spouse? Will you by love seek a plan to compromise with your mate to remove the point of strife between you? Take the biggest issue that is dividing you right now, and ask God to show you a creative way where *you* can give. This may entail restraining yourself from a particular action or taking one to demonstrate your love and desire to reconcile this issue. Don't wait for your spouse to take the first step; you take it.

**3. Keep talking.** So often when a compromise is needed, couples give up too soon by simply failing to talk about the problem. When communication over an issue ceases, anger and frustration will always increase. It would be much easier if the couple would simply sit down and talk the issue through. Many times your mate will tell you what is an acceptable compromise in the midst of such a conversation. Haven't you ever heard your spouse say to you in the middle of a disagreement, *“Honey, if you would have just done this I wouldn't have been angry,”* or, *“Next time, could we please do this?”* This is your compromise.

Communication is always an important key to a creative compromise. Yes, it is difficult to talk about some issues, especially ones that you have disagreed about many times before, but it is absolutely essential that you keep talking if a compromise is to be reached. It's easy to murmur and complain to your friends or other family members about how inflexible your spouse is, but this action is sinful and destructive to your entire relationship. Rather, you should take the issue directly to your mate and ask for an opportunity to discuss it.

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**Be assured that when selfishness reigns in the heart, no compromise will be found.**

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A great illustration of the benefit of direct communication is seen in the early church. When the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a conflict between the Hebrew and Grecian widows. It appears that the Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily support that the church was giving. At first these widows only murmured and complained about the problem with no solution. Then someone decided to communicate the problem directly to the apostles and the problem was immediately resolved. It was a simple compromise of appointing seven men to care for these widows. It was also a very creative and wise compromise because, as you read the list of men they appointed in Acts 6:5, you will notice that all seven names are Greek. What a sensible and fair compromise this was to have Greek oversight of Greek widows. This concession solved the problem and it *"pleased the whole multitude"* (Acts 6:5).

Therefore, if there is an issue in which you have not found a compromise, go back to the conference table and begin to talk again. Be ready to discuss where you are willing to give and where you may need to ask forgiveness. Remember, the Lord never stops seeking to talk and reason with you about the issues that He wants to change in your life. He is persistent in this effort. He says *"Come now, and let us reason together"* (Is.

1:18). Why not take the same action toward your loved one? As you continue to communicate with your spouse, you will gain the needed insight and understanding that will enable you to find a compromise. If you are repeatedly rejected in your request to talk the issue through, it may be time to get a third party involved to help the communication just as the widows did in the early church.

**4. Keep praying.** After you have talked an issue through and you are still struggling in obtaining agreement, you can pray. The reason prayer is so important in finding a compromise is because it is where you give God the opportunity to reveal your heart and motivation. Prayer helps you to examine yourself as to whether you are truly willing to give or not. Many times couples can argue back and forth with good sounding arguments for why this or that should be done. Yet, in reality, the real reason for these hard fought positions is just selfishness. Be assured that when selfishness reigns in the heart, no compromise will ever be found.

Therefore, when you pray, ask God to reveal to you and your spouse the true motivation of your hearts. Scripture declares that *"the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts"* (1 Chron. 28:9). God spoke to Jeremiah pleading with him: *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know"* (Jer. 33:3). If God knows every intent of your heart, He can surely reveal it to you. If you are willing, prayer will bring the personal revelation you need.

Prayer not only helps you to see your own heart but it also helps you to see the issue from God's perspective. When you pray you will naturally draw near to Him as David discovered, *"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth"* (Ps. 145:18). As you draw near to God He draws near to you. He begins to fill you with His Spirit and the fruit of His love. This motivates and softens your heart, which makes you more open to His Word and His wisdom regarding your circumstances.

Don't ever underestimate the power of prayer to help you find a compromise. Ask God to reveal your motivations and to fill you with the Holy Spirit to produce the attitude needed to compromise.

But, what happens when only one partner is open to compromise? If only one person is doing all the giving, agreement won't last very long. Sacrificial love entails give and take by both partners. Notice the reciprocal relationship taught by Paul in his teaching on marriage: *"Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church"* (Eph. 5:22,25). If the compromising is not reciprocal, the person who always gives will ultimately become offended by the other partner's lack of love, and strife will resume. Scripture teaches that we are *each* to *"look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:4). If both husbands and wives treated each other with the common courtesy afforded other brothers and sisters, agreement and compromise would be easier to find.

If your spouse is not willing to compromise or find agreement regarding the conflicts between you, the issue must be addressed immediately. If your mate continually refuses to give, talk, or even pray about the subject with you, you need to ask your pastor or an elder of the church for help and counseling.

**What happens when you have made every compromise possible and there still is not a perfect agreement?**

This is a question often asked because it is a common experience in marriage. What should you do when you've done all you can and the compromise is still not exactly what you'd hoped for? Is there something more you should do? Yes! You must accept your differences and walk in love.

Let me be absolutely clear here. I am not saying that you must accept sinful or immoral behavior. Acceptance should only come into play when the issue is not a black and white one biblically and only after you have worked at giving, talking, and praying about it for a long time. There is always a lot of giving that can take place before you come to accepting things the way they are. Some of the issues that you may need to simply accept would be: if your mate is not as outgoing or reserved as you are; or he or she doesn't share your interests; or when

his or her sexual drive is not as high or low as you would like. These issues usually don't change much over the life of a marriage because they are differences caused by personality, background, temperament, or hormones. In these circumstances it's important to remember that there are no perfectly matched couples on the face of the earth. No matter who you are married to, you would find these same kinds of differences. It is unrealistic for you to think that your reserved and quiet mate will ever become as outgoing as you or that your spouse will radically change to enjoy everything that you do. You can find agreement in these differing areas if you will labor to give instead of demand. Also, be careful not to despise him or her for your differences. Rather, compassionately accept your mate. This attitude will make possible further compromise and agreement together.

Some have asked me why God would ever put two so completely different people together in marriage. The answer is very simple. He wants to teach you what it means to love. How can you be so sure this is God's purpose? The Bible tells us that marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with His church (Eph. 5:32). Daily He is loving us and we are learning what it means to love Him in return. The great commandment is to *"love the Lord your God with all your heart...And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt. 22:37,39). You are in the same process of learning how to love your spouse with all your heart. Don't resist this work; yield to it!

Where does the Bible teach this loving acceptance of those gray areas? In Romans chapter fourteen Paul taught concerning the necessity of walking in love over non-moral issues. Then, notice how He began the fifteenth chapter: *"We who are strong ought to bear with the...weak, and not to please ourselves. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God"* (Rom. 15:1,7 NIV).

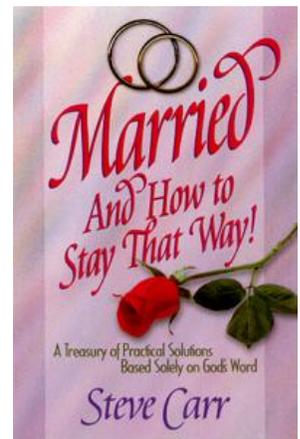
To understand and apply this passage in your own life you must consider how Christ has accepted you. He sees you with all your faults and imperfections yet loves you anyway. He does this because you have come into an agreement with Him about your sin and have received the covenant of His blood. You are in Christ,

standing in His righteousness. He has *"made us accepted in the Beloved"* (Eph. 1:6 KJV). His total acceptance of you declares: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Heb. 13:5). Furthermore, in all the areas that still need His transforming work; He is not deterred one bit from the necessity of continuing to labor in love to bring you into greater harmony with Himself. His acceptance of you in Christ is the proof of His committed love to see the work to its end (Phil 1:6).

God wants you to accept one another in the same manner. This is God's call to you: Accept your spouse. Don't let small differences become great divisions between you. Quit concentrating on your differences in personality or anything else you can't change and focus on what you have in common. Seek agreement through compromise, forgiveness, prayer, and denial of self. Begin today by talking about those issues that you are still angry about, that you know are not resolved. These issues won't work themselves out; you have to resolve them with your mate. Express commitment to your spouse that you want to learn to accept those characteristics that you realize aren't going to change much. Pledge to your loved one, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Graciously accept one another to the glory of God!

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