

# COVENANT KEEPERS

“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”

Volume 4 - Issue 4

Fall Edition

## How to fight fair.

This title may stir up questions in some of your minds. *Does this writer assume that Christian couples fight? Is he resigning himself to the fact that we will fight? Does he think that we aren't fair when we fight?* The answer is yes to all of the above questions. This is exactly what I think happens in most Christian marriages today.

Let's be absolutely honest with one another. You and I both know that every married couple fights at some time in their relationship. Some of you fight more than others, and I am sure that sometimes you aren't fair with your spouse. My conviction concerning this kind of behavior originates from what the Bible teaches about man. Paul declared the fact that there is no temptation that is not “common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words, we are all very much alike and have similar trials and temptations. In addition, we are all sinners by nature, and therefore, are not always loving or fair toward one another.

I am also convinced that at times we don't treat each other fairly. In counseling I will quite often hear one partner declare, “That's not fair!” when the details of a conflict are brought up. Have you ever said these words to your partner in the midst of a disagreement? Sure you have. Each of us has an innate sense of what is fair and what is not. Consequently, if you are unfair with your mate during an argument, nothing will be resolved. Your spouse will only focus on how unfairly he or she is being treated and will lose sight of the initial conflict.

However, let me add a word of encouragement here. Experiencing conflict does not mean the end of your marriage. You must see conflict as an opportunity for change and growth within your relationship. The only time conflicts will become detrimental is when you are unfair with one another and you fail to resolve the issue you are fighting over. Remember, all trials are working God's perfect work in your life if you will only submit yourself to God and allow Him to change you (James 1:4).



**Don't attack each other!**

## How do we define what is fair?

The Bible defines the word *fair* as being honest and rendering a just and equal response toward one another. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet records a charge made against God by His people. “The house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not

*fair.*” However, God responded to them, “O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?” (Ezekiel 18:29). Therefore, the best definition of what is fair will always be the way God has dealt with man. His just and evenhanded approach in the way He has loved and corrected His people must be our ultimate bench mark of what it means to be fair with others. God has demonstrated the ultimate fairness by giving His own Son to die for the sins of the world that all men would have a way of escape from the judgment to come. However, mankind has been very unfair toward God in that man has not responded in a manner equal to the gift of His grace.

## How do we fight unfairly?

**1. You are unfair when you are dishonest.** When you fail to be honest with your spouse, you automatically hinder a fair exchange of ideas that would ultimately enable solutions to be found to your conflicts. Dishonesty comes in many different forms within your relationship. Let me give you some examples.

Have you ever been asked by your spouse, “What's wrong, honey? You seem upset.” Your response is, “Nothing.” This reply is clearly dishonest because there is obviously something wrong as revealed by your angry or depressed countenance. The question is asked because your mate can detect your discouragement and is attempting to help or resolve the issue. Often when couples come for counseling these *nothing* issues come out. Then the partner who made the original inquiry will say, “I

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

---

*never knew this. That is not fair. I can't read your mind. Why didn't you just tell me?"* I usually turn to the other spouse at that time and explain that I agree that the action was unfair.

Dishonesty is also seen in exaggeration. When you declare to your spouse, *"You always act that way,"* or, *"You never do what I ask,"* you cause your partner to think back to the one time when he or she didn't do what you allege is an everyday experience. It is therefore very unfair to overstate your case in this manner. This behavior will only cause further conflict.

---

**Remember, all trials are working God's perfect work in your life if you will only submit yourself to God and allow Him to change you.**

---

In addition, dishonesty includes the telling of half-truths or only the part of the story that suits you. I hear couples every week in counseling say, *"That is not what you said last night when we talked."* It's unfair and dishonest when you knowingly change your statements from one day to the next. This is a sinful behavior that will derail your entire relationship. If you ever desire to resolve your differences, you must be truthful. Remember, we are to *"speak the truth in love"* (Eph. 4:15).

Likewise, you are being dishonest when you quickly change the subject or shift the blame when your personal faults are being revealed. You must recognize that this is a form of dishonesty within your heart and God won't bless your attempt to reconcile this conflict. Why? Because you are not being fair with your spouse. God knows it, you know it, and your partner knows it.

Last, it is dishonest when you try to give subtle indirect messages to your mate. When you endeavor to encourage more intimacy with your husband and you say, *"Have you noticed how much time George spends with his wife?"* or, when you seek to change your wife's house-keeping habits by saying, *"Wasn't Mary's house exceptionally clean?"* it is very unfair to your spouse because you are seeking to communicate a message without being direct. You can't expect your partner to read your mind and intentions.

**2. You are unfair when you hold on to things from the past.** Today we often hear people speak about the problem of carrying around emotional baggage. I believe the problem in most marriages is much more serious than that. I have found that emotional baggage is many times rooted in sinful baggage. What do I mean?

Let me illustrate how the typical couple acquires the sinful baggage that will greatly affect a marriage relationship emotionally. Suppose a wife gets up in the morning and makes a nice breakfast for her husband. He comes to the table and complains about the food and speaks very harshly to her. She becomes angry and resentful but says nothing. She simply puts this offense into what I call her "stuff sack" inside her heart. Her husband then goes to work and his wife goes into the bedroom and finds his dirty clothes in a pile on the floor. She angrily adds this offense into her stuff sack. She then enters the bathroom and looks at the sink only to find the remnants of her husband's morning shave all over the countertop. She again gets angry and stores up her resentment within her heart all day long.

That evening her husband comes home and walks in the door to find the house a total mess. He also gets angry and begins to store-up his resentment in his emotional stuff sack. He then greets his wife who is still in her bathrobe and has not even brushed her hair from the morning.

He fumes inside because he has asked her to take better care of herself with little response. All of a sudden there is a scream from the kitchen. Dinner has burned because she was too busy watching a talk show on television. The wife sees her husband's disgust at the whole situation and she explodes like a volcano. He then responds in like manner. After a few days of tension and coldness, the angry conflict seems to be forgotten, but it is still unresolved. However, the following week the same thing happens all over again. This time there are different circumstances but with the same result. Does this sound familiar? Have you had similar situations occur in your home?

---

**Dishonesty can come in many different forms within your marriage.**

---

What should you do instead? Deal with each issue as soon as possible. Scripture teaches us that we should keep a very short account of the offenses that occur in our relationships. Paul expressly taught, *"Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil"* (Eph. 4:26-27). In other words, take care of the conflicts before each day ends. If you don't, you are opening the door to the devil and inviting him to have a grand opportunity in your marriage. Disobeying this command means that conflicts will always become worse, not better. All you are doing is storing your resentment up for a bigger explosion down the road. Don't hold your resentments and then unload them all at once on your spouse. That's unfair.

Here is a simple plan for the next conflict you encounter. When you sense yourself becoming bitter inside, begin by asking God to forgive you for any hatred or resentment (Mark 11:25-26). Remember, don't

---

harbor the bitterness! This is where all the problems begin. Then choose to forgive your mate from your heart, which will then enable you to be ready to grant forgiveness when your mate acknowledges his or her offense. Next, seek the infilling of God's Holy Spirit that you might have a controlled attitude as you go to your spouse and calmly explain how he or she has sinned against you (Gal. 5:16-17). Last, don't be dishonest. God loves "truthful" lips (Prov. 12:19).

**3. You are unfair when you personally attack your spouse.** Personal attacks upon your spouse with harsh words, innuendoes, exaggeration, or blame are incredibly destructive to your entire relationship. The chief problem with such attacks is that they fail to resolve anything with reference to the conflict itself. In fact, they usually only intensify your differences. Paul warned, "*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*" (Eph. 4:29-30). Corrupt communication is not only swearing or foul language, but any words that tear someone down instead of build someone up.

---

## **You can't expect your partner to read your mind and intentions.**

---

Saying such things as, "*You are such a slob. I hate you,*" "*You are so pigheaded,*" or "*If you don't like it, why don't you divorce me?*" only serves to grieve the Holy Spirit of God and corrupt and destroy what's left of your relationship. You need to stop this kind of language today while there is still time to repair your relationship. The worst thing about attacking your partner is the fact that

you never get around to attacking the problem. Failing here only assures you that this conflict will come up again very soon.

How can you keep yourself from getting into the attack mode? One of the simplest ways is to use wisdom in your choice of words. When communicating with your spouse you might say, "*John, I am very frustrated with these clothes on the floor. Can we talk this over?*" Or, "*Honey when I come home and have to step over toys and shoes just to get to the kitchen, it sets me off before I can even say hello. Can we talk about this?*"

In addition, controlling your anger will greatly help you to refrain from personally attacking your spouse. Anger always begins to boil inside your heart when you hold on to an offense day after day without resolving it. Resolving issues quickly will keep you from those volcanic eruptions where you spew out the resentments from several previous conflicts. You must learn how to "*stop contention before a quarrel starts*" (Prov. 17:14).

Controlling your anger can also be accomplished by simply asking God to fill you with His Holy Spirit. It's not enough to simply want to control your anger, you need a power beyond yourself to help you do it. Paul said if you would "*walk in the Spirit*" you would not fulfill the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

It all comes down to a matter of choice when you are dealing with the issues of conflict. Do you want to resolve the issues or allow them to continue to fester? Do you want to discuss the problems in a controlled way or explode and resolve nothing? Do you want to do it God's way or try and handle it your way? It's your choice.

**4. You are unfair when you fail to do what you require of your mate.** Many times people have confessed to me what goes through their minds when issues are not being resolved in

their relationships. They think to themselves, "*If he (or she) is not going to be loving or giving, then I won't either.*" Can't you see how completely unfair you are in assuming this posture? You are doing exactly what you are condemning in your spouse.

---

## **Don't hold your resentments and then unload them all at once on your spouse. That's unfair.**

---

How should you respond when your spouse doesn't behave correctly? Paul declares, "*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you*" (Eph. 4:31-32). Notice the sinful reactions listed here. Be assured, behaving in this manner is not how God desires you to respond. He intends you to behave in a manner that is directly opposite. He wants you to be kind and tenderhearted. In other words, you must do what you want your spouse to do toward you. This is the point of the Golden Rule: "*Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them*" (Matt. 7:12). In addition this is what it means to "*overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:21). Are you doing this?

It's ludicrous for you to demand that your spouse be loving, sensitive, and romantic when you are harsh and condemning. Can't you realize the contradiction of this expectation? The most important word in Ephesians 4:32 is the word *Be*. You must focus your attention on being the person God wants you to become. Be kind. Be tender. Be forgiving. This kind of behavior will always give you the spirit of fairness necessary to go through the hard times.

---

However, attaining these qualities does not mean that you can't speak to your mate about his or her deficiencies, it merely gives you instruction about the correct heart attitude necessary to be successful when you speak.

**5. You are unfair when you fail to respond equally.** If you are reading this newsletter and you are resistant to reconciliation, you must recognize that your behavior is very unfair to your mate. Your spouse is demonstrating the desire to reconcile and you are fighting it. I know you are probably thinking right now, *But you don't know how much I've been hurt.* You have probably been very hurt, but don't let your pride keep you from responding in an equal manner. If your spouse takes a step toward reconciliation, shouldn't you do the same? If you continue to resist and harden yourself in your position, I can assure you that nothing will change for the better in your marriage. In fact, it will surely get worse.

Remember where we started this article? We looked at the charge that the people of God were making concerning the fairness of God in His dealings with them. They believed God was behaving unfairly toward them. How did God respond? He reminded them, "...is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?" (Ezekiel 18:29). What did God mean by this statement? He was the one who reached out to love and continually sought reconciliation with them. But, their response was to only make further charges. The people resisted His attempts and they walked away. The Father counted this as extremely unfair.

If all you can do is find fault and charge your spouse when he or she is seeking reconciliation, aren't you too behaving unfairly? Just as the people of God failed to respond with equal love and willingness, you are failing to respond to your mate's outstretched hand. Remember, it doesn't require a lot of effort to shoot

the darts of accusation and condemnation at your partner's confession and repentance. However, it does require great effort to examine yourself and humbly confess your personal faults to your mate. Won't you respond with equal effort? This would be fair, and it would give you a fair chance at healing your relationship. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain!

COVENANT KEEPERS © 1997

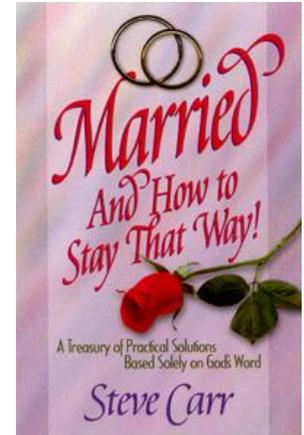
For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) or by email at [ccag@calvaryag.org](mailto:ccag@calvaryag.org) or at 805-481-2320.

#### **Additional Resources**

**Single DVD Presentations:** Each DVD is designed to encourage couples in specific areas of their marriage and includes a worksheet. Titles include:

- ◆ *Building Understanding with Your Spouse*
- ◆ *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*
- ◆ *The Mystery of Oneness*
- ◆ *How to Fight Fair*
- ◆ *Strengthening Communication Skills*
- ◆ *Developing a Strong Christian Family in a Chaotic World*
- ◆ *Building a Better Marriage*
- ◆ *Developing Greater Companionship*
- ◆ *The Song of Solomon (3 DVDs)*
- ◆ *Realistic Expectations*

**Counselor Training Manual:** The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying DVD training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis. To order call (805) 489-9088 or visit the web site at [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)



***Married And How To Stay That Way*** by Pastor Steve Carr is now available. This book will give you a treasury of practical guidance to help you to resolve the conflicts in your relationship and give you biblical tools to build your marriage. To order your copy:

**Telephone orders:** (805) 489-9088 Have your VISA or MasterCard ready

**E-mail orders:** Send all mailing and credit card information to: [scarrck@lightspeed.net](mailto:scarrck@lightspeed.net)

**Internet orders:** [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Postal orders:** Pastor Steve Carr, PO Box 463, Arroyo Grande, CA 93421

**Please send *Married And How To Stay That Way* to:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Book Price:** \$12.99 in US dollars. Please add sales tax and shipping to your order.

**Sales Tax:** Add 8.75% for books shipped to California addresses only.

**Shipping:** \$4.00 for the first book and \$2.00 for each additional book to cover shipping and handling within US, Canada, and Mexico. International orders add \$7.00 for the first book and \$3.00 for each additional book.

**Payment:**

Check  
 VISA  MasterCard  
Card number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_  
Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_