

# Biblical Principles for Relationships

Communication, Expectations, Forgiveness, & Conflict Management

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## Introduction: Biblical vs. Dysfunctional Relationships

### - What do biblical relationships look like?

- In friendship: LOYALTY
  - “A man of *too many* friends *comes* to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24).
  - “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” (Proverbs 17:17).
- In marriage: SACRIFICE
  - “Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:22)
  - “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25)
- In parenting: TRAINING
  - “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
  - “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4)
- In family: SUBMISSION
  - “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:3); “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long in the land.” (Ephesians 6:1-3)

- In the body of Christ: UNITY
  - “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:22-23)
  - “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:2-3)
- **What do dysfunctional relationships look like?**
  - Anger:
    - “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger quiets a dispute.”
  - Quarreling:
    - “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, so you murder. You are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” (James 4:1-2b).
  - Selfishness:
    - “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil practice.” (James 3:16)
  - Pridefulness:
    - “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.” (Proverbs 16:5)
  - Lack of truth-telling/admonishing:
    - “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ... therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. .” (Ephesians 4:12-15, 25)

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with gratefulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:13)
- Lack of tenderness/affection:
  - “Now to sum up, all of you be like-minded, sympathetic, brotherly, tender-hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but giving a blessing instead, for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:8-9)

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## Biblical principles for Godly Relationships

### - **Communication:**

- Clear communication is the backbone of functional relationships.
- How should we be communicating:
  - With truth: “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4: 25)
  - With grace: “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up what is needed, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29)
  - With careful consideration: “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” (Proverbs 12:18); “Know this, my beloved brothers. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.” (James 1:19).
  - With a calm tone: “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

### - **Expectations:**

- Expectations are the term we give to preferences and desires we have for how others should act toward and interact with us.
- If you find yourself easily offended, which 1 Corinthians 13:5 specifically instructs us NOT to be, a good place to start is asking yourself these questions to determine what your expectations are, why or how they are not being met, and what sins you might be guilty of in response to not having them met:

- What did I think **SHOULD** have happened here?
- How did I decide that's what should have happened?
- Is the standard upon which my expectation is built a **biblical principle** (I can defend it clearly in Scripture) or a **personal preference** (it's just the way I prefer things to be)?
- Without being legalistic, can I justifiably and confidently say that the other person has sinned against me by not meeting my expectation?
- **If the answer is yes**, move on to the next point, "forgiveness."
- **If the answer is no**: God's Word is very clear. When it comes to personal preferences (as opposed to biblical principles): we are not to allow ourselves to be easily offended (1 Corinthians 13:4-5) and we are to submit to the other person's preferences (Philippians 2:3-4).
  - "Love is patient, love is kind, is not jealous, does not brag, is not puffed up; it does not act unbecomingly, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*." (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)
  - "Doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not *merely* looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)
- That leaves very little room in life for us to demand our expectations be met by others. Rather, we are to diligently, joyfully, and selflessly surrender our expectations and serve others rather than demanding that they serve us.
  - "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." (Romans 12:9-10)
- **Forgiveness:**
  - When others have wronged us, or when we have wronged others, reconciliation should be pursued hastily.
  - "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matthew 5:23-24)

- “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17: 3-4)
- Forgiveness isn’t always cut and dry. It is easy to know what to do if someone asks for forgiveness, but what do we do if we believe their apology is insincere or, worse, what if it never comes?
- If you believe someone’s apology is insincere, you must choose to forgive them anyway. You must choose to believe them based on the words they are saying, even if you suspect they aren’t genuine in their apology.
- “[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:7)
- “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is dignified, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8)
- What do we do when someone has sinned against us but doesn’t/won’t apologize?
  - **First**, be certain that they have sinned against you and that an apology is required.
    - Check your own pride, your own hurt, your own sense of justice and make sure it is aligned with Scripture before you demand repentance from them.
    - If you can rebuke them with Scripture, do so. But if your hurt feelings are the standard for whether or not someone has wronged you, you need to humble yourself and release the offense in your own heart.
    - We are called to be honest, and a kind friend or spouse will want to love you the way you desire to be loved. But a faithful friend will not allow you to make yourself a god and demand others worship your feelings, your wounds, your preferences, or your false standards of holiness.
  - **Second**, if someone has legitimately sinned against you and refuses to repent, you must pursue one of three courses of action:
    - If they are unsaved, love and pray for them:

- “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:44-45)
- If they are saved and a members of a healthy church by whom they can be held accountable, pursue formal discipline:
  - “Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault, between you and him alone; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)
- Whether they are saved or unsaved, you always have the option to choose to overlook the offense and let the love of Christ cover it, always being careful not to use this option as an excuse to never confront sin:
  - “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (Philippians 4:8)
  - “Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse...Never paying back evil for evil to anyone, respecting what is good in the sight of all men, if possible, so far as it depends on you, being at peace with all men, never taking your own revenge, beloved—instead leave room for the wrath of God. For it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:14, 17-21)
- How to put forgiveness into practice (adapted from a sermon by Adam Tyson of Placerita Bible Church):
  - Once someone has asked for forgiveness and you have granted it, or you have chosen to overlook the offense:
    - Do not bring it up to others (gossip/slander)
    - Do not bring it up to that person (unforgiveness/revenge)
    - Do not bring it up to yourself (bitterness/keeping a record of wrongs)
  - When should I seek counsel for sins that have been committed against me:

- When the sin is illegal. Both the church and law enforcement need to be notified immediately.
- When you have both been deep in God's Word and in prayer and there is still no resolution.
- When you know that you and/or the other person are spiritually immature and need individualized correction and guidance.
- **Conflict Management:**
  - The textbook definition of interpersonal conflict is:
    - "An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals." (Wilmot and Hocker, Interpersonal Conflict, 2010)
  - The biblical definition of interpersonal conflict is:
    - "Conflict, in the biblical context, refers to a state of opposition, struggle, or discord between individuals, groups, or spiritual entities. The Bible presents conflict as a consequence of human sinfulness and the fallen nature of the world, yet it also offers guidance on resolving and overcoming such discord." (Topical Encyclopedia)
  - Conflict that arises from selfishness or individualistic ambition is sin.
  - When conflict arises because wrongdoing has occurred, both parties are called to take a step back and consider before addressing the conflict:
    - "Know *this*, my beloved brothers. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20)
    - "He who responds with a word before he hears, it is folly and shame to him." (Proverbs 18:13)
    - "He who holds back his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of discernment." (Proverbs 17:27)
  - Biblical conflict resolution involves:
    - **Humbly admitting when one is on the wrong and asking for forgiveness when one sins against another:**

- “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes *them* will receive compassion.” (Proverbs 28:13)
- **Boldly but graciously rebuking sin:**
  - “Better is reproof that is revealed than love that is hidden. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” (Proverbs 27: 5-6)
- **Forgiving those who ask for forgiveness:**
  - “Instead, be kind to one another, tender-hearted, graciously forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has graciously forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32)
- **Overlooking an offense when possible:**
  - “A man’s insight makes him slow to anger, and it is his honor to overlook a transgression.” (Proverbs 19:11)
- **Restoring one another to affection and community without lashing out in anger:**
  - “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (Philippians 2: 14)
  - “Let all bitterness and anger and wrath and shouting and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” (Ephesians 4:31)

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## Application: How to Love Others and Repair Relationships God’s Way

### - How to love others well:

- **Have a heart of unity, selflessness, and sacrifice:**
  - “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, *being* united in spirit, thinking on one purpose, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not *merely* looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:1-4)
- **Foster deep affection for others by asking the Lord for humility, grace, forgiveness, and love toward others:**



- “So, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, *and* patience; bearing with one another, and graciously forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord graciously forgave you, so also should you. Above all these things *put on* love, which is [b]the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body, and be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)
- How to repair a strained or broken relationship:
  - **The process might seem oversimplified in Scripture, but God’s Word is clear, if a professing believer repents, he or she is to be restored to the body of Christ:**
    - “Brothers, even if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, *each of you* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ; So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” (Galatians 6:1-2,10)
    - The emphasis is on the one who sinned and has repented. That person’s burdens are to be borne and he or she is to be restored to the affection and community he/she enjoyed before the sin was committed.
    - This doesn’t mean there aren’t consequences to their actions. We can and should move forward with caution, especially if the sin was harmful in nature.
    - Disgraced leaders who are guilty of adultery, for instance, can be restored to christian fellowship, but should not be restored to a position of leadership.
    - Great wisdom and care needs to be taken to determine exactly how a repentant sinner should be restored to fellowship. Considerations include: type of offense, who was harmed in the process, length of concealment, and whether or not “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8) can be verified.
- When to go no-contact (God’s standards, not the world’s):
  - “Cutting people off” is counter-biblical in most cases. The world tells us to go n-contact to “protect our peace,” as the logical solution when people don’t “respect our boundaries,” and basically any time you just don’t want to do the hard, hard work of being in relationship with other people.

- Biblical relationships take a lot of work, a lot of patience, a lot of grace, and in most cases, we are called to bear with one another to preserve relationships.
- There are, however, three instances in which biblical “no-contact” is permitted:
  - **When someone has been disciplined out of the church** (excommunication, see our discussion on Matthew 18 above).
  - **When a professing believer is living a life of flagrant, rebellious, unrepentant sin:**
    - “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people; I *did* not at all *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the greedy and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is a sexually immoral person, or greedy, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Are you not to judge those who are within *the church*? But those who are outside, God will judge. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)
  - **When a professing believer is teaching a false gospel:**
    - “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. The one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting, for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.” (2 John 1:9-11)