

Biblical Counseling Training Institute  
Subject: Emotions/Feelings/Affections  
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How To Respond To Verbal And Emotional Abuse In A Manner That  
Glorifies God And Is For Your Own Good.

Please answer the following question:

Which of the following three marital complaints do you suppose is the most frequent among a Christian husband or wife?

1. Physical abuse?
2. Sexual abuse?
3. Verbal/Emotional abuse?

Generally speaking, when there is physical abuse in marriage, most always the husband is the abuser and the wife is the abusee. Likewise, when there is sexual abuse in marriage, most always the male is the abuser and the female is the abusee. However, when it comes to verbal and emotional abuse, BOTH husband and wife participate in the abuse. Thus both are abusers and abusees.

I. What You Should Know And Understand About Verbal And Emotional Abuse

1. The Scriptures clearly say that verbal abuse is sinful.  
A. I Pet. 3:9, 15-17; 4:4-5
2. The Scriptures clearly illustrate that not all words that appear to be unkind/unloving constitute verbal abuse  
A. Matt. 15:12-14  
B. Lk. 11:45-46  
C. Lk. 10:38-42
3. The Scriptures clearly illustrate that verbal abuse often creates emotional pain (By emotional pain, it is meant that "feelings" are hurt).  
A. II Sam. 16:5-14
4. There is no marriage that does not have some degree of verbal and emotional abuse.  
A. James 3:2  
B. Eph. 4:29
5. Verbal and emotional abuse are NOT Biblical causes for separation and/or divorce.  
A. Matt. 19:1-9

B. I Cor. 7:12-16

6. There is a godly way (Biblical) to respond to verbal abuse and there are sinful ways to respond.

A. Eph. 4:29-32

B. James 3:9-10

7. I am not accountable to God for what my spouse says to me

(or doesn't say), but I am accountable for how I respond. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I must choose to respond as Jesus would respond. We must respond in love and kindness while speaking the truth.

A. Matt. 12:36

B. Eph. 4:15, 20-27

## II. What You Should Know And Understand About Emotional Pain

1. Examples of emotional pain

a. hurt feelings

b. unhappiness

c. anger

d. bitterness

e. frustration

f. depression

g. lack of feelings for a spouse

2. Commonly heard statements that reflect emotional pain:

a. "I am so unhappy in my marriage."

b. "I am so angry with him/her."

c. "I am so frustrated with my husband/wife."

d. "I don't love him/her anymore."

e. "He/she never has a kind thing to say to me."

3. As Christians, we are responsible for our emotions (feelings). We are accountable to God to "feel" ways that glorify God.

No one can make me "feel" depressed, angry, without hope, hateful, etc., except myself. No matter what my spouse does, he/she does not have the power to consign me to a life of unhappiness unless I allow them to!!!

4. Emotions (feelings) can be changed. By understanding

how

emotions are formed in us, we are then prepared to "feel" in ways that please the Lord and will be for our own good.

5. Question: How are emotions formed or where do emotions come from according to the Scriptures?

Answer: Emotions are the by-product of thoughts and behavior! Notice how the following Scriptures prove this:

a.) John 13:11, "If you know these things, happy will you be if you do them." Notice the three words, "know, do and happy."

b.) John 15:11, "I have told you these things that my

joy may be in you and your joy may be full." Here Jesus affirms that the result of His teaching and adhering to it is joy.

- c.) Ps. 42:5, "Why are downcast , O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God." Here the Psalmist acknowledges that his "depression" is due to his failure to put his hope in God. The whole Psalm illustrates that emotions result from our thinking.
- d.) Gen. 4:6, "Why are you so angry Cain? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" Here God affirms that Cain's depression and anger were due to his sinful behavior.

How a person thinks and how he/she behaves will determine how a person feels about anything. But the process for changing sinful (negative) feelings/emotions begins with the mind! If a person thinks wrongly or believes wrongly, he will "feel" wrongly. If a person thinks sinfully, his/her emotions will correspondingly be sinful. If a person thinks Biblically, he/she will feel joyful and fulfilled. Thoughts (and behavior) affect and control emotions.

In order to reduce a person's emotional pain in his/her marriage, that person must work to change his/her thoughts and beliefs and behavior.

When a counselee comes to me for marriage counseling and I discern that the person is hurting emotionally (anger, bitterness, loss of hope, lack of feelings for the spouse, etc.), I have learned over the years that more times than not the person is not thinking biblically. This failure to think in accordance with truth that God has revealed leads to emotional pain (anger, bitterness, frustration, hatred, etc.), in marriage. We need to encourage those suffering emotionally to compare their thoughts with truth to see if they are really understanding reality correctly.

It is tempting to believe that circumstances require us to feel certain ways, but that idea is not accurate. It is patently false. Circumstances, no matter what they are, do not require us to feel a certain way. Rather, what we think about those circumstances and how we correspondingly respond in our behavior will determine how we feel about them. This is to say that events are not entirely responsible for feelings. Examples:

(A.) Two people who endure the same dental procedure have different reactions. One may be terrified while another feels no anxiety.

(B.) One angry man blames his wife for everything that goes wrong while another husband feels overwhelmed with guilt and blames himself.

(C.) Some people handle inconveniences such as broken down cars with only slight discomfort, but it seems a major crisis to others.

(D.) Some people are thoroughly distraught in congested traffic, while another person is not troubled at all.

(E.) Consider the Apostle Paul. His life and writings clearly illustrate for us that circumstances do not require us to feel a certain way. Think about Paul for just a minute and what he wrote to the Philippians. When Paul wrote Philippians he was imprisoned in Rome, not knowing if he would be released or executed. We might assume these circumstances would demand despair, but Paul's letter shows a surprising hopefulness. The theme of Philippians is "joy" and it was written by a man who was about to lose his life!

Though finding himself in terrible circumstances, Paul wrote "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" How could Paul feel joy in the midst of such circumstances? His admonition near the end of the letter gives us the clue: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things" (Phil. 4:8).

Even 3 verses earlier Paul gave a clue as to how he could be so calm, cool and collected in the midst of terrible events, Paul said in vs. 5, "The Lord is near." It was because Paul believed God to be sovereign and present in his life, that he could rejoice in spite of unlovely circumstances! We and our counselees, can too through studying and coming to believe good Christian doctrine.

From this passage (and many others), Paul teaches us 2 very important truths about feelings and thoughts:

(1.) Bad events do not require us to feel awful; and,

(2.) Healthy (HOLY) thinking (and behavior) allows us to control our feelings. While events can stir up feelings, they do not dictate or mandate feelings. Healthy, accurate thinking-thinking that is in alignment with Scripture-enables people to cope with trials of life, including a poor marriage.

As fallen humans, we are prone to think incorrectly (and then to behave in accordance with our incorrect thinking). This is because of the effects of original sin upon man's mind. Being depraved, man does not think correctly. To change our emotions/feelings, we must learn to think in accordance with truth.

Where do our feelings come from? They come from our thoughts/beliefs (John 13:11, 15:11; Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 4:4-8 and many others). By thinking

differently, we can learn to have control over our feelings.

Illustrations of how thinking controls emotions:

- a.) Lottery
- b.) death of child
- c.) Pastor Howard Sugden

As Christians, we are not to allow our thoughts and feelings to form within by the events that life throws our way. This is to say that thoughts and feelings are not to be determined by life's events. If life's events determined our thoughts and feelings, then we could never help anyone with emotional pain because we can't control the events that come into our lives or the lives of others. The key to coping with disappointment in a spouse or an unpleasant event that comes into our lives, is to make sure that my thoughts/beliefs about the event align themselves with Biblical truth.

Emotions result from beliefs. Thoughts create feelings. Most people who come for marriage counseling assume that events in their marriages cause them to feel a certain way. This is not true. Thoughts cause feelings and thoughts can be controlled. Thoughts can change through changing beliefs. Feelings can change by changing thoughts. We must help people to think accurately in order to change emotions. Inaccurate thoughts come from false beliefs (assumptions) that a person has about God, himself, others and the world.

Examples of how people "lie" to themselves and these lies produce negative emotions (Notice the inaccurate talk in the following statements).

1.) Not long ago a husband said to me, "My wife\_\_\_\_ doesn't contribute anything to our marriage."

I responded by saying, "really, tell me the reasons why you say that."

He proceeded to say that she did not earn any money, she did not clean the house as he expected, she did not communicate with him in a way that pleased him. I reminded him of the exact statement that he had made about his wife and I told him that this was part of the reason for his emotional pain in his marriage. He was constantly speaking to himself in inaccurate ways (lying to himself). I asked him if his wife cooked for him? "Yes." Does she do the dishes? "Yes." Does she do the laundry? "Yes." Does she take care of the kids? "Yes." Does she run errands for him? "Yes." Does she have sexual relations with him? "Yes." Yet, the man was constantly speaking inaccurately to himself in telling himself that his wife made no contribution to the marriage. When I was able to get him to begin thinking differently (in accordance with truth), his emotional pain with

his wife began to disappear. While this couple still has a long way to go, they are making some progress.

2.) Not too long ago, a wife said to me, "I hate my husband \_\_\_\_\_. My husband is worthless. He is lazy; he won't work; he has no initiative. I made a bad choice for a mate."

I asked the wife to state for me all the good things about her husband that she could think of. After a long pause and with some prodding from me, she and I were able to think of a lot of good things about her husband. Some of his good traits were, "he goes to work everyday." "He comes home at the end of work every evening." "He fully supports her and her child(ren)." "He pays the bills." "He doesn't complain about child(ren) from another marriage and having to support (them)." "He gives her great freedom and does not nag or complain if she spends money." "He is not overbearing or unkind." Etc.

The types of inaccurate thinking reflected above is known in psychological circles as "negative filtering." Negative filtering occurs when a person filters out the good things that happen and focuses only on the bad. As Christians, we should forget the phrase, "negative filtering" and simply call it what God does, "lying", "dishonesty" or "exaggeration." As Christians, we must realize that we are all prone to do this and in order to help people suffering emotional pain in marriage, we must not allow this to take place. We must encourage people to speak even to themselves honestly. When they do this, over a short period of time, they will see that they "feel" much better. This is to say that their emotions will change for the better as they think more in accordance with truth.

