

Reconcilable Differences

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

“We seem to be at each other’s throat all the time lately. I yell, he yells. I hurt him. He hurts me. I don’t know what we’re going to do!” We hear this — or something like it — a lot. More now than we use to.

CONFLICT. It doesn’t have to cripple us, but it does. Because we just don’t know how to handle it constructively. We can’t seem to figure out **why** we have it, and don’t know **what to do** with it when we see it coming. We need **RETRAINED** in conflict. Most of the methods we use to handle conflict don’t work. Sure, we keep using them — we complain, we criticize, we accuse, we gripe and we blame — but these just don’t work, do they?

In this and the next few **Seeds for Growth**, we will be talking about conflict: why we have it and what to do about it. We all need all the help we can get to learn to live in peace and unity.

We believe there are basically three reasons why we fight. These are (1) because of our differences, (2) because of power struggles and (3) because of faulty communication patterns. In this **Seeds for Growth**, we are going to discuss only our **differences** and how they can strengthen our relationships instead of tearing them apart. This first cause for conflict is a biggy, and more than enough for us to digest at one time.

DIFFERENCES cause a great deal of conflict because **we are different**. Wow! That was profound, wasn’t it? O.K., if this is so obvious, then why don’t we catch these little invaders before they do their damage? Why? Because of our expectations.

Your expectations seem to you to be the most normal, natural and right things in the world. Well, sorry to be the one to have to tell you...but they are **not**. Many of your expectations are unrealistic. They are unrealistic

because the person you are expecting them from is **not you**. Your mate is different from you, with his or her own set of expectations. But unfortunately, we hang on to expectations. And when they are not fulfilled (which is pretty often), we get frustrated. Frustration explodes into anger; and then we demand that our mate do it our way. But that only pushes his defense button. He digs in his heels and yells, “No way!” The result? **Conflict**. Our expectations make us work very hard to get what we think we want.

Our differences are Reconcilable!

Let’s take an honest look at some of our differences, admitting as we do so, that it’s all right to be different.

1. We are different because of the way we were brought up. Our families of origin were different. Some of you had strict parents, some lenient. Some of your families made a big deal over birthdays and holidays, some didn’t. Being from different families is almost like being from different countries. We are going to see things from opposite points of view. You might as well expect it.

2. We are different because of our birth order. Every child born in a family is really born to a different family. That sounds crazy, but let us explain. The first born comes into a family of two, usually inexperienced adults. The second born enters a family of two adults and one child, and so on. See how that can make a difference in the way you approach life? First borns are often driven by success and control. After all, they may have been pushed to walk, talk and do everything early. Second borns are usually the opposite of whatever the first born is in order to establish their own identity. Does this give any insight into your driven mate?

3. We are different because some of us are thinkers and some are feelers. Thinkers want their “feeler” mate to be logical like they are. Feelers want their “thinker” mate to share their feelings the way they do. This just isn’t going to happen, Folks. But the good news is that your relationship needs both the thinker and the feeler to find a good balance. Could that be why God put you together? To balance you both?

4. We are different because some are inner people and some are outer people. (No we’re not talking about belly buttons.) Inner people are thoughtful and thorough but probably not the life of the party. Outer people are gregarious and open but may not carefully think things through. Please notice that both inner and outer people have wonderful strengths. Strengths which each other need.

5. We are different because some are organized and some are spontaneous. An organized person likes to plan. A spontaneous person likes to have life happen to them. Organized people are usually steady and dependable. Spontaneous people are usually good at adjusting to life’s changes. Of course, Felix and Oscar (*The Odd Couple*) just about drove each other crazy. And you will too unless you come to understand that spontaneity needs a little organization; and organization needs a little spontaneity.

6. We are different because some of us are female and some are male. You noticed? This in itself makes for huge differences. Your bodies are different in their strengths and weaknesses. You even use your brains differently in processing thoughts. You are gloriously different. Sure, God could have made Eve a clone of Adam. But He chose to make her complementary instead.

O.K. — so we’re different. What do we do about it? We have to learn to handle our differences so that they

Differences (cont')

bring completion (wholeness) instead of conflict to our relationship. Here are three suggestions to help you do that; specifically, to help you correctly respond to your partner's differences so that they will no longer be a source of conflict. If you do these consistently and persistently, things will change around your house...for the better.

1. The first response to your mate's differences you must learn is to **forbear them**. That's right... **FORBEAR**. Forbear means more than to simply "put up with." The Greek word for forbear literally means "to hold up, to endure with gentleness, clemency, and a sweet reasonableness." In other words, to forbear means to put up with without rolling your eyes, sighing, or feeling any disgust whatsoever. Ephesians 4:1-3 commands us to forbear: *...I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* Again, the Holy Spirit commands through Paul in Colossians 3:12-14: *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* Would your life — would your

home — be different if you really obeyed these commands?

2. The second correct response is to **see your partner's differences as strengths instead of weaknesses**. Logical thinking is a strength; intuition is also a strength. Thoughtfulness and thoroughness is a strength; but so is sociability. The ability to organize is a strength; and the ability to adjust is also a strength. When we begin to see our partner's differences as strengths instead of weaknesses, we will begin to understand how we can pool our strengths, and our coupleness will be strong indeed. We make our best decisions when we pool our strengths. Harold is a thinker; Bette is a feeler. He makes his lists of pros and cons and why's and wherefore's. She has strong intuition. When we put these together, we can make good decisions. But when we view each other's characteristics as weaknesses instead of strengths, we face situations as halves instead of a whole. And we make half-baked decisions...with half-baked consequences.

**View our differences
as strengths!**

3. The third correct response to your mate's differences is to **stop trying to remake your partner to be like yourself**. If God had wanted two of you, He would have made two of you. Instead, He made you unique;

and He made your wife or husband unique.

What are the techniques we use when we try to change our spouses? Whining, nagging, manipulating, complaining, blaming, guilt-laying? Do you notice these behaviors are the exact opposite of the commands we read earlier in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3? **God's Word works**. Our techniques do not.

**God's Word works – our
methods often don't.**

Differences will always exist. In fact, did you know your differences are probably what drew you to each other in the first place? God means them for your good. He knows with His strong help, you two can blend those differences, so that together you are stronger than each of you are separately.

Now, that is not to say we all don't have areas in our lives that need to change. But, let's face it. The things about our mates that annoy us are usually those differences which are simply part of who they are. It boils down to this: the choice is yours. By learning to respond in the three ways we just described, you can make your differences bring **COMPLETION** and **WHOLENESS** to your relationship. Or you can ignore God's principles and allow your differences to erode your relationship with conflict. It's up to you. **We pray you choose completion.**

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