

Leadership & Submission

– Sunday School Notes –

Over the past two weeks we have looked at the example of David, his strengths and weaknesses as father and husband, and ways to overcome similar problems. As before, it turned out, that husbands and wives need to work together in this and that the creating an atmosphere of love, respect, and acceptance that makes him feel at home in his family is probably the most important thing a wife can do to turn her husband into the active and caring partner she always wanted to have.

10 Anger – the woman at war

Unfortunately, the situation in many families is quite the opposite. Instead of being loved, accepted, and valued highly by their wives – quite a few husbands experience that their wives have gone at war with them. Where there used to be love and respect there is now a constant confrontation and no more willingness to submit at all. Her feelings towards her husband are dominated by anger and she shows her hostility on all occasions.

As an example, let us look again at the confrontation between David and Michal in **2. Samuel 6:16–23**, this time from the perspective of Michal. David just celebrates the return of the ark of the covenant . . .

And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

That already says it all. She *despised her own husband*. Her feelings for him have become so low that just by looking at his dancing she despised him. Now there may have been various reasons for Michal to develop negative feelings. Maybe she was embarrassed by his lack of dignity or he hadn't shown the same enthusiasm for her for quite some time. None of these, however, *are any excuse for this reaction*. There is absolutely no justification for it.

I have to emphasize this, because many people – particularly women – try to excuse their negative reactions by somebody else's behavior. They say that they can't do anything about the negative feelings they develop. But the Bible says, you can. In **Ephesians 4:31**, Paul writes: Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. Your feelings about another person – not about what has happened but about the person itself – are entirely your responsibility. And don't say you have no control over them – you have if you only want to.

Let us go back to **2. Samuel 6:20–23** and look at the dialog that follows.

And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today

Notice the bitter irony that is intended to say *You surely made an idiot out of yourself*.

... disrobing in the sight of slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!

So instead of saying “I felt embarrassed by what I saw” she decides to attack his character. No man likes that and it is no wonder that David retaliates. He doesn’t even try to calm down his wife but instead chooses to attack her family and make an implicit suggestion that was surely meant to hurt her. There is no excuse for David’s reaction as well, but it makes absolutely clear that this wasn’t the first time where they had a conflict. And verse 23 makes clear that their relation didn’t get much better in years to come:

Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

So here we see a marriage with a lot of hostility between wife and husband. Has it always been that way? What do we know about the two?

1. **Samuel 18:20, 27–28** tells us how it all began.

And Michal Saul’s daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king’s son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife. And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul’s daughter loved him. **1. Samuel 18:20, 27–28**

This was more than just a political marriage. She wasn’t given to David against her will but the Bible emphasizes that *she loved him*. This went even so far that she deceived her own father, when he tried to kill David (**1. Samuel 19:11–17**). She did everything for him at a time when he was a nobody.

But years later the situation had changed. There was brooding anger in her and a very strong reaction to a minor embarrassment. What turned this marriage filled with so much promise into such a poisoned relationship? Many answers to that question certainly apply to women today as well as they apply to Michal.

1. Certainly, it was a problem to be married to a *man* who is so much occupied in his own world, his job, his ministry, or in this case his kingdom. Michal had to realize that *her husband’s passions were elsewhere* and not really much with her.
2. This also applied to his devotion to God. As her reaction shows, she definitely *felt excluded*, shut out from his inner thoughts. Husbands should know that a ministry and devotion to God is intended to be inclusive, not the private affair between a man and God. It is the chance to let your wife get to know you as you really are.

3. David's many wives were definitely a problem. How can you develop a close relationship with your wife when there are so many other people around that get so much attention from you?

So the passivity of husbands is one of the main contributing factors in the downfall of a marriage. Their wives feel neglected and they feel that they need to do something to get their husbands' attention. And they do this by choosing the one and only approach that is certainly doomed to fail – by declaring war. They believe that if they are just loud enough, that if they attack often enough, then their husbands will realize the problem and change.

But – that is not how it works. Surely, the husband will realize a problem, but for him the problem is his angry wife, not the issues she is trying to communicate. The only thing that he will feel is the offense, the fact that his wife doesn't accept him as he is. And, if he had any desire to make a change into her direction before, it is certainly gone after the attack. And even a man can't just control his actions only by what he knows to be right. He must feel that it is worth trying – not that his wife will sit judgment over him.

Do you want to lose your husband? Go on criticizing him and express your anger whenever there is a chance. He may not go for a divorce – *we Christians don't do that* [IRONY]. Husbands can stand a lot of pain before they do something. But he may simply withdraw from you completely and this is just the opposite of what you wanted. So let us take a closer look at anger.

What is it? What triggers it? And how can we deal with it?

10.1 What is Anger?

Anger is a feeling that is almost always triggered by outside events – but it also strongly depends on our current state of mind whether these events affect us or not. Often it all begins with a minor irritation. But the final reaction that results from it is a major catastrophe.

We all know situations like that. We have a very tight schedule and are already late. And then we simply can't find the car keys or our reading glasses or anything else that we absolutely need right now. We storm around the room “*Where are my keys?*” and this soon turns into accusations “*Who moved my glasses?*” – and in one moment the simple fact that *WE* misplaced something has created a situation that is absolutely miserable for the people around us. After the item has finally been found we're usually quite embarrassed about our own behavior – and also too embarrassed to apologize – because it all began with the fact that we were too proud to admit that *we* were the cause of the problem that made us so angry and chose to blame others for it.

Our behavior while driving in heavy traffic is usually also quite revealing. Surely, some drivers can certainly upset you. They don't stop at stop signs and red lights;

they still keep on standing after the signal has turned green for 10 microseconds; they fail to use turn signals or don't turn them off; they turn into the road right in front of us and force us to break; they go too slow in front of us and too fast behind us; and the worst of all is if we get into traffic jams. All this can turn a decent Christian man or woman into a fuming monster. We simply can't accept that the mistakes or misbehavior of other drivers but fail to realize that we ourselves make mistakes as well which are graciously accepted by others.

There are many more examples of events that make us angry and not in all cases the reaction is as harmless as in these cases.

But if we look at them from a distance, we realize that anger, although stirred up by an outer event, is an emotion that is *entirely under our control*. We can't do much about the irritation that we feel initially. There are certainly enough situations around us, that make us feel angry. But *we can control whether this feeling can develop further in us or not*. It is our choice whether we explode and lash out or not. I know, many people do not believe that – but did you ever realize how easily you could control your emotions when you're standing in front of a person who had authority over you – and how little you control them in front of your husband? The Bible says

In your anger do not sin! . . . and do not give the devil a foothold. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you. **Ephesians 4:26–27, 31, 32**

Love is patient, love is kind . . . it is not easily angered and keeps no records of wrongs
1. Corinthians 13:4–5

It is up to us to choose right or wrong when we feel the anger creeping up in us. Do we want to give the devil a foothold in our life? We certainly do if we allow him to play on the organ of our emotions as HE wants to. If we don't want to control our emotions, he will surely do this for us. Do we want that?

I have to emphasize this over and over again, because many people simply do not *want* to take control over their feelings – as if this would be something unnatural and because they view their feelings as trustworthy source of information. They probably are to a certain extent – but you have to learn how to interpret them and that negative and angry feelings are *definitely out of touch with reality*.

There is NO excuse for what you do if you let yourself be guided by anger. There may be people in the world who know exactly which buttons to push to make you upset, and your spouse is definitely among them. And I know that keeping control over negative emotions is not easy when your spouse makes you upset. I personally fail often enough and I observed that women have even greater difficulties in that than men. But that doesn't change the fact that we *must learn to control our anger* – or we will see no progress in both our faith and our marriage.

10.2 What Causes Anger?

Now that is easier to be said than done. Many people have tried hard to fight their own anger. We know that what we do is not right, but we seem to be unable to do much about it. If we want to find a solution for that, we need to understand where anger comes from.

We already noticed that anger is something that is going on *within us*. Our anger is still there long after the *source* of anger has gone. Anger is more than just momentary emotional outbreak. It more like hidden mine fields that were planted long ago and have lain forgotten. Nobody realizes that there is a problem until you step on it. But then the reaction is deadly.

Who planted these mines? *You did it yourself* as a means to protect yourself from the people that were closest to you: your father, your mother, your siblings, and your spouse. They all made mistakes in the way they treated you, but your reaction to these experiences eventually planted the mines.

If you grew up in a family where *love depended on good behavior*, then you probably react very strongly to anything that appears negative. And by focusing on the negative you will believe negative feelings more than the positive reality.

If you *never experienced forgiveness*, you will have a hard time to forgive the mistakes of others or to apologize for your own ones. So you will explode whenever your husband does something wrong and you blame all your mistakes on him as well.

Let us look at Michal again. What were the factors that eventually drove her to become the angry woman she was? We will find that many of these apply to numerous women who experience a lifetime of anger with respect to men.

1. Michal's father, Saul, was a dominating but brooding man. His deep depressions were the reason why David showed up in the palace in the first place (**1. Samuel 16:14–23**). His opinions were the law. Few could approach him and you couldn't be sure if out of a bad mood he was ready to kill you (**1. Samuel 19:9–10**). It is unlikely that he was any different in his family.

In homes, where Dad is a tyrant, a little girl spends her life in fear and develops a resentment at her future role as woman. She so much fears to be used that she will do anything to avoid it. Submission to a man is almost impossible, because that would give her husband a chance to use her as he wants to. There is little trust in men at all and a woman should do everything possible to *win* over a man – even if that means war.

2. Saul also placed little value in his younger daughter. He thought her love for David was only an opportunity for him to get even with his rival: *I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him*, is what he said in **1. Samuel 18:21**. I am sure that Michal sensed how *little value she had as a person*, and actually – what Saul said about her turned out to be quite accurate.

Fathers, be careful about what you say to your daughters – particularly when you need to correct them. They will take to heart what you say *about* them and your words too often become self-fulfilling prophecies.

3. Given the father she had, Michal was probably very sensitive about details that remind her of home. Many women do that. They constantly probe their husbands and watch for anything that could resemble negative events from the past. They simply cannot let go of the past – instead they continue to touch the “hot stove” of hurt that they already carry around for so many years.
4. For Michal the worst thing was to become the spectator in the life of her husband – powerless to influence his thinking or actions and mostly neglected by him, again bound to the palace as in the time when she grew up. The feeling of neglect was all too familiar but one that she thought never to have to accept again. So the time bomb was triggered and just waited for a moment to explode. *Neglect* is probably the strongest trigger for a woman to go at war with her husband. And while her methods certainly do not bring her husband’s attention to the right issues, a husband who experiences the constant battle with his wife should reconsider his view of marriage.

Show her that you need her as a wife, not just as a housekeeper! See to it that you have a life together, where you share everything – your inner thoughts, your visions, the problems you’re facing, and your prayers.

And she needs you as well. In **1. Peter 3:7** men are encouraged to live with their wives in an understanding way. That means among others, that you should listen to your wife, ask her about her opinion, and take it serious.

To many a husband, this first means that he needs to understand the language of his wife, because – as you may recall – our ways of communicating are very different. It will take a full lifetime to figure out what your wife actually means when she speaks to you. That may seem too complicated but it is worth it. Because if you don’t, you will give your wives a lot of reason to be angry about a man who doesn’t care about her.

So a woman’s tendency to go to war with her husband may have many causes that go back numerous years. They cannot be taken as excuse for letting her anger grow – which is still sin – but will help husbands to understand the message behind it. They will also help husband and wife to find ways how to deal with this problem together.

10.3 The Woman at War

But before we think about possible solutions we want to take a look at the various patterns that a woman uses to act out her anger. Each of them is both designed as a means to *get attention* and as a means to *defend herself*. Usually, a woman will repeat the patterns that she feels most comfortable with and that have shown the best results from her perspective. Unfortunately, this perspective aims at short-term gratification with little thought for the long-term harm that comes from a slow erosion of her marriage.

10.3.1 The Challenger

Many women who go to war with her husbands decide to take the role of adversary. She decides to beat him on his own territory and begins to compete with him in the outside world. Like him, she sets up her own world, to be independent of him. Sometimes she takes a job – just to make sure that she does not depend on him. There is nothing wrong about a woman taking on a job. The problem is that in this case the motives are wrong. The job is not taken for the benefit of the family but for *independence*. The result of this step is, at best, decreasing trust and increased distance. But it often ends up in separation because wife and husband have nothing in common anymore.

But competition is not only seen in the workplace, but also in other areas of life. A woman who competes with her husband wants to do everything better than her husband. She tries to be perfect. She knows everything better, she is always right and never admits mistakes – instead she blames others for things that go wrong. She never forgives but brings up past events in all arguments. She constantly criticizes her husband, and passes judgment on about everything that goes on in the world. In a conversation she always has to have the last word.

These behavior traits, usually considered as typically male, seldomly occur in all variations at once, but none of them is really beneficial for a marriage – regardless whether they come from a man or a woman. But a woman who does these things not only shows disrespect for her husband, but also openly rejects God's word: she doesn't even try to submit.

The problem for her is that deep down inside she is extremely vulnerable, but too afraid to display any needs, fearing she could be rejected and that her weaknesses could be used against her.

10.3.2 Fire and Ice

A second strong weapon of an angry wife is to use the sexual relationship against him. Instead of letting it bring joy and fulfillment to both of them she uses it to humiliate and frustrate her husband, either by withdrawing from him or by stirring up his "performance anxieties". For a woman, who feels out of control in most areas

of her marriages, uses the sexual relationship as a silent cry that should remind her husband that she too is a factor to be reckoned with.

Some men need this wake-up call and have to recognize that their wife is a person too. But this is not the way to express this cry for recognition. The sexual relation is the most intimate communication a couple can have. If a woman allows her unsettled conflicts to communicate a physical desinterest in her husband, further complications in the relationship will arise quickly. It is the wrong message she is sending. Her husband will seldomly be able to figure out the real cause of their burdened sexual relation if she doesn't talk about the unresolved conflicts that make her withdraw.

Other women just go into the opposite direction. Instead of withdrawing they do about everything to humiliate their husbands, expressing their dissatisfaction with his ability to "perform" and satisfy in their sexual union. A particularly deadly form is to compare him with former boyfriends or mentioning "his" problem in the presence of others. Fortunately this happens extremely seldomly in Christian Circles but for a man this is the ultimate expression of rejection.

With the exception of joint counseling, there is absolutely no reason to talk to anybody else about your intimate life. And comparing your spouse with any other person in the world is totally out of question. And that includes drawing comparisons to the cooking qualities of your mother or qualities that you like more in another person you know. Your husband or wife may need some improvement but comparisons are not the right way to do that – it just creates a feeling of rejection. We all are very vulnerable in this.

10.3.3 Ridicule

A similarly deadly weapon is the use of ridicule as a means of humiliation. The ability to strike a verbal blow in an argument may help to silence your opponent, but does not convince him that you were right. He just gives up resistance.

Some people have sharpened the skill of ridicule and cutting remarks to perfections. They have become masters in the art of character assassination by constant practice. About 20 years ago I did this with a friend for about half a year and we both had a lot of fun – but only because we both knew what we were doing. Believe me, you become very creative after a while. But we also found out that it is difficult to avoid this practice in contact with others and that – apart from the sharpening the mind to react quickly – this practice was not beneficial in any way. So we agreed to stop this. I had almost forgotten by now until I prepared this lesson.

The dangerous aspect about this practice is that it turns every relation into a combat. Only the strong survive and the weak crawl off to die. There is no space for a relationship of trust and respect, because you either can never take off your helmet or have already defeated your spouse.

A relationship between wife and husband should be based on love and mutual sub-

mission. Wives who are at war with their husbands show that they have little trust in them, no desire to submit at all, and no love for them – at least not the unselfish love that is so important to make a marriage grow.

10.4 The solution principle: look at the truth

But what can you do if you find yourself trapped in a warzone? How can we actually put an end to our anger?

1. The first step is *looking at the truth* and to admit that the problem lies in us. The real source of anger lies in ourselves, not in outer circumstances. We have to put aside the false notion that somebody else is responsible for our anger. We think too much about the *object* of our anger. But we should better ask the question: *what does our anger say about us?* What is it *within us* that triggers the emotional outburst?

If we accept the truth, this truth will eventually set us free.

2. Make it a *top priority to control your anger*, not just a pious wish that has little importance for you. **Genesis 4:6–7** makes it very clear why this is necessary. Here, God asks Cain

Why are you angry. If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?
But if you do not what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you but you must master it.

If you have problems with anger, add this to your personal prayer list. And let your spouse know about this. This already will build a lot of trust, because he now knows that you yourself want to achieve a change. He will surely try everything to help you in that.

3. *Practice self-discipline.* **Ephesians 4:26** gives us some very valuable advise:

In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Anger is valid, if its object is sin or injustice towards others. Jesus displayed “holy wrath” when he cleared the temple in **John 2**. But when anger is used as a means to protect ourselves – and this is what happens in 99% of the cases – it is sin and we need to deal with it.

Clarify a situation before the day ends, even if you feel your spouse was really the one who blew it. Don’t wait for him to apologize first. Don’t even try to find out who’s right. Settle the problem, pray together, and ask God for forgiveness – and mean it.

4. *Develop healthy habits:* Get into regular contact with the truth and make it reality in your life. Reading God's word every day is an extremely important habit, but it should not stop here. Learn to trust God's word in what it says about you. Cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving for *exactly how God has made you*. **Psalm 139:14** says:

I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are your works; and my soul knows it very well.

Convince yourself that God does not lie, when he says this about you. If you know that you are wonderful, you don't need your anger to protect yourself.

Finally, express your genuine love to your husband and wife. If you do that, you can't be holding a grudge at the same time. This needs some practice and attention to the details of love. Love requires accountability – you sometimes need to do “chores” that are not pleasant but necessary to keep the love nurtured. One of the best chances to express your love is after an argument. If you break the ice and express your love although you don't feel like it and wait for the other to come to you, you will win the heart of your spouse quicker than by any other means.