

The God-Centered Spouse

Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Greg Nettle, pastor of the RiverTree Christian Church in Massillon, Ohio, was walking to his car after a golf tournament when he realized the remote trunk opener wasn't working. Neither were the automatic door locks. When he finally got inside the car, he saw the fuel gauge reading empty, even though he had filled up on gas less than twenty-four hours before. More frustrating yet, the car would turn over but then immediately die.

After a tow truck delivered the disabled vehicle to the dealership, a mechanic came out to Greg and told him the problem: a bad BCM.

"What's a BCM?"

"The basic control module. It's essentially the car's brain, and once it goes bad, everything starts malfunctioning."

Greg could have insisted on "fixing" the trunk, the door locks, the gas gauge, and any number of problems — but those were merely the symptoms of an overall malfunction.

How often do we do the same thing with marriage! We focus on the symptoms:

- "We need to improve our communication."
- "We need to get better at handling conflict."
- "We need to show more appreciation for each other."
- "We need to have a more unified plan with the children."
- "We need to work harder at keeping the romance alive in our relationship."

We can spend a lifetime focusing on the symptoms, or we can replace the BCM — the basic control module. I believe the BCM for marriage is our *spiritual motivation*.

It all comes down to this: Are you a God-centered spouse or a spouse-centered spouse? A spouse-centered spouse acts nicely toward her husband when he acts nicely toward her. She is accommodating, as long as her husband pays her attention. A spouse-centered husband will go out of his way for his wife, as long as she remains agreeable and affectionate. He'll romance her, as long as he feels rewarded for doing so.

But Paul tells us we are to perfect holiness *out of reverence for God*. Since God is always worthy to be revered, we are always called to holiness; we are always called to love. A God-centered spouse feels more motivated by his or her commitment to God than by whatever response a spouse may give.

Spouse-centered Christians try to make excuses to stop loving their spouses because of their spouses' sins. But if this were a valid excuse, every one of us could avoid the call to love, since every one of us married a sinner!

One woman came up to me after a seminar and said, "It would be easy to be married if my husband were half as holy as you." I managed to contain my laughter and pointed out that she had no idea how "holy" I was; my wife feels pushed beyond her limit in many areas while trying to love this sinful man.

But that's not the point! I am not called to love my wife because she is holier than other wives (though I'm deeply thankful for her godliness). I am not called to love her because she makes me happy (though I am grateful for the many good times we share). I am not called to love her because she makes me go all gooey inside (though sometimes she still does). I am called to love her *out of reverence for God*. Any other motivation is less than Christian.

If I am to rid myself of anything that may contaminate body or spirit, then I can give no place in my life to jealousy, bitterness, resentment, or selfishness. I am always called to practice gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. Someone else's sin — even the sin of my spouse against me — never gives me the license to respond with sin. I am called to just one motivation, and one only: reverence for God.

In one sense, what my spouse says or does or doesn't do is almost irrelevant. Every decision I make, every word I utter, every thought I think, every movement I perform, is to flow out of one holy motivation: reverence for God.

Are you a God-centered spouse?