



Resolving Conflict

I came across the following quote while I was in seminary, and I have never forgotten it:

*"To dwell above with saints we love,
That will be grace and glory.
To live below with saints we know,
That's another story!"*

The beginning chapter of human history in the Garden of Eden was characterized by wonderful harmony and oneness. Unfortunately sin entered the relational equation early on and relationships have struggled ever since. Shifting blame, separateness, and murderous anger appear in the third and fourth chapters of the Bible. We live in the era of conflict and easily broken relationships. Jesus came to unite sinners to God and sinners to each other. The gospel by which rebels are reconciled to God and restored by grace to good terms with God is the same gospel that sends us into the world with the gift of the ministry of reconciliation. (II Cor. 5:17-21) Followers of Jesus are on a mission to bring God's remedy for brokenness in relationships with God and our fellow man.

This means that every Christian is on mission with God to bring reconciliation. Adopting Biblical models and methods of conflict resolution are critical components of being "...equipped for every good work." (II Tim. 3:17) Here are a few approaches to conflict we need to LAY ASIDE: 1) A Win/Lose Strategy where all issues are black and white and negotiation is a sign of weakness. Relationships are sacrificed to retain "rightness." 2) Avoidance Strategy where one hopes that all disagreements will resolve themselves if given enough time. This only leads to superficial relationships.

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Getting to the Heart of Conflict

Wouldn't it be wonderful if people could simply renounce their bad habits and decide to respond to conflict in a gracious and constructive way? But it is not that easy. In order to break free from the pattern they have fallen into, they need to understand why they react to conflict the way they do.

Jesus provides us with clear guidance on this issue. During His earthly ministry, a young man approached the Lord and asked Him to settle an inheritance dispute with his brother. "Jesus replied, 'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions'" (Luke 12:13-15).

This passage reveals a common human pattern. When faced with conflict, we tend to focus passionately on what our opponent has done wrong or should do to make things right. In contrast, God always calls us to focus on what is going on in our own hearts when we are at odds with others. Why? Because our heart is the wellspring of all our thoughts, words, and actions, and therefore the source of our conflicts. "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:19).

The heart's central role in conflict is vividly described in James 4:1-3. If you understand this passage, you will have found a key to preventing and resolving conflict.

Ken Sande

http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIPH/b.958147/k.4979/Getting_to_the_Heart_of_Conflict.htm

Join us for Resolving Everyday Conflict, an 8-week DVD and discussion based Sunday School class beginning Sunday March 2nd @ 9:45a.m.

Memory Verse

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. - I John 4:10-11

Every Conflict Is a Test

The New Testament does not hide the fact that nearly every church in the Apostolic age experienced conflict. As the New Testament writers addressed these matters, they provided invaluable instruction on how believers are to think, act, and treat one another when conflict arises. By studying the churches in the New Testament and the instructions given to them regarding conflict, we can learn biblical principles for handling conflict in a constructive, Christ-honoring way.

A Key Principle to Remember

One of the most important principles I have discovered to guide me when engaged in conflict of any kind is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is this: when conflict arises, our attitudes and behaviors should reflect our new life in Christ given by the Holy Spirit who lives within us. We are to display the fruit of the Spirit and not the works of the flesh. We are to be Spirit-controlled and not flesh-controlled or out of control. Serious discord threatened the life and unity of the newly planted churches of Galatia. So Paul warned the new believers: "If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15).

If these new Christian believers did not stop fighting, no one would survive the carnage. After Paul warns of the potential for mutual destruction within the believing community, he charges his readers to "walk by the Spirit" and not to gratify "the desires of the flesh" or display "the works of the flesh."

Do Not Display the Works of the Flesh

Much of the contentious infighting that plagues many churches today results from believers acting according to the flesh and not the Spirit. In Galatians, Paul focuses on eight social sins of the flesh that ruin relationships and divide churches: "Now the works of the flesh are evident ... enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy" (5:19–21; see 2 Cor. 12:20 for a similar list).

As you consider these eight "works of the flesh," know this: the Holy Spirit is absolutely opposed to each of them. Galatians 5:17 states, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other." Paul's catalog of social vices stands as an objective check to our behavior. So the next time you are involved in conflict, stop and think. You know you are yielding to "the desires of the flesh" if any of the above sinful vices are displayed in your behavior or attitude.

The one thing Christian believers are not to do when engaged in conflict is to revert back to our old, pre-conversion, flesh-driven ways of behavior.

Alexander Strauch

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/every-conflict-is-a-test/>

The Four G's: A God-centered summary for guiding our responses to conflict

- **Glorify God** (1 Corinthians 10:31).
How can I glorify God and give witness to what Christ has done for me in this situation?
- **Get the log out of your eye** (Matthew 7:5).
How have I contributed to this conflict and what do I need to do to resolve it?
- **Gently restore** (Galatians 6:1).
How can I help others to understand how they have contributed to the conflict so that we can be restored to one another?
- **Go and be reconciled** (Matthew 5:21).
How can I demonstrate forgiveness and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?

<http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/Reference/AOR/gtth.pdf>

Quotes

What are you really living for? It's crucial to realize that you either glorify God, or you glorify something or someone else. You're always making something look big. If you don't glorify God when you're involved in a conflict, you inevitably show that someone or something else rules your heart.

- Ken Sande, *Resolving Everyday Conflict*

What does it matter if I suffer injustice [from others in the community]? Would I not have deserved even more severe punishment from God if God had not treated me with mercy? Is not justice done to me a thousand times over even in injustice? ... Those who live by justification by grace are prepared to accept even insults and slights without protest, taking them as from God's chastising and gracious hand.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*

Display the Fruit of the Spirit

When facing conflict, instead of biting and devouring one another and displaying the destructive social sins of the flesh, we are to "walk by the Spirit," be "led by the Spirit," "live by the Spirit," "sow to the Spirit" (5:16, 18, 25; 6:8). Nothing but the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is sufficient to enable believers to resist the desires of the flesh and to live Christlike lives.

The Spirit seeks to form Christlike character qualities in the life of every individual Christian and every local church body. These qualities promote right attitudes, godly conduct, and healthy relationships—the very qualities the strife-torn congregations in Galatia desperately needed. Paul's nine descriptions of "the fruit of the Spirit" form a composite picture of Christlike character and conduct: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (5:22–23). We know that we are walking by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit when we see "the fruit of the Spirit" displayed in our daily conduct and inner attitudes.

"The fruit of the Spirit," then, provides an objective guide to our attitudes and behavior when dealing with conflict. So we should always ask ourselves: "Am I displaying a Christlike character and the life of the Spirit when I deal with disagreement or someone who opposes me?" Hopefully, we all can answer, "Yes."

When caught in a storm of conflict, one fruit of the Spirit that is especially needed to navigate safely through the storm is "self-control" (5:23). Lack of self-control is a major problem during conflict, but the Holy Spirit provides power over the fleshly excesses generated by sinful passions of anger, jealousy, hatred, and the spirit of revenge.

Christian believers who control their emotions and thinking by the power of the Spirit are best able to handle conflict constructively and bring about a just resolution. They are Christians who don't bite and devour their brothers and sisters in Christ.

In contrast, when people act according to the flesh, they are out of control emotionally. They do not display the fruit of the Spirit and have the potential to do terrible damage to other people and to the name of Christ.

Conflict presents one of the toughest challenges to walking by the Spirit. If only we would recognize that every conflict is a test as to whether or not we will display Christlike character and the reality of the gospel in our lives. Will we as Christians display the beautiful fruit of the Holy Spirit or the ugliness of the flesh?

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Giving in Strategy involves the people pleaser approach where yielding to the other party at any cost in attempting to maintain peace. There is a better, Biblical approach: The Care-Fronting Strategy involves directly approaching the other person in a caring way looking to advance God's agenda, humbly looking for the best way to bring healing and health to the relationship and a proper resolution to the conflict. (See Matt. 18:15-18) Which approach do you adopt most of the time?

Pastor Mark Musser.

March 30th – 5th Sunday Soup and Salad Church-wide Fellowship.
Directly after the morning service; in the Fellowship Hall.

MARCH 2014

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						Men In The Morning 1
Sunday School @ 9:45 A.M. 2 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	3	Fusion Youth Group 4	Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer 5	6	Ignite Youth Group 7	8
Sunday School @ 9:45 A.M. 9 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	10	Fusion Youth Group 11	Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer 12	13	Ignite Youth Group 14	Men In The Morning 15
Sunday School @ 9:45 A.M. 16 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	17	Fusion Youth Group 18	Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer 19	20	Ignite Youth Group 21	22
Sunday School @ 9:45 A.M. 23 Worship Service @ 11 A.M.	24	Fusion Youth Group 25	Mid-Week Bible Study and Prayer 26	27	Ignite Youth Group 28	Men In The Morning 29
Sunday School @ 9:45 A.M. 30 Worship Service @ 11 A.M. Family & Friends Day & Fellowship	31					

Recommended Resources:

- Ken Sande. The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict.
- Ken Sande. Peacemaking for Families. A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your home
- www.alexanderstrauch.com
- www.peacemaker.net