

A Christian Approach To Conflict Resolution

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<http://www.aibi.ph/articles/confresl.htm>

If you are like me you don't like conflict and you think that if you skip learning conflict management skills then you might be spared having to deal with it. However conflict is so inevitable for Christians that Paul tell Timothy that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.". (2 Timothy 3:12).

Many Christians regard being in conflict as being in sin. It is not seen as a normal part of the Christian life. Yet Jesus has taught us, at some length, how to manage conflict and Proverbs has whole sections on it.

Conflict is inevitable for three reasons:

- a) Our knowledge is incomplete and imperfect so even sinless people in a perfect world will see the same situation differently through their own knowledge and perspectives.
- b) Satan engineers conflict whenever and wherever possible especially amongst Christians. Satan sets us in conflict with ourselves, God and one another.
- c). We knowingly enter into and initiate conflict with evil whenever we proclaim the gospel, preach holiness, protest against sin in our society, teach against cults or testify to Christ in the midst of a world that does not want to change.

Thus conflict is here to stay and we must learn to manage it in a Christian "Kingdom way" until Christ returns to take us home to heaven where there will be no more crying or sickness or pain. This article will give you twelve handy hints on how to manage the conflict in your life in a Christian way.

1. Go before God until you get His perspective on the conflict.

Do not act or speak out of rashness, anger or a sense of injustice.

Moses had to learn this , his impetuous loss of temper in conflict situations cost him 40 years in the wilderness on one occasion and the loss of entry to the Promised Land on another. However when Moses did get God's perspective on situations he was able to intercede with power and resolve even the most difficult of situations such as national apostasy and idol worship, religious rebellion and "takeover bids".

2. Remember God is bigger than the problem.

The God who created the heavens and the earth is able to deal with giants in the promised land, fortified cities and huge warriors called Goliath.

Pray through the problem until you are walking by faith not sight and you see the problem as just like a small pebble in the hand of an Almighty God.

3. Act in the "opposite spirit".

If a person is stingy be generous to them. If a person is insultingly aggressive - turn the other cheek. If they impose on you do even more for them than is asked of you. Return love for hatred and prayers for persecution. This actually does work and I have seen lives totally transformed by it. It transforms both lives too! Instead of returning evil for evil and causing the problem to escalate you learn how to overcome evil with good. When combined with persistence in doing good this is a powerful life-transforming weapon against evil. It can produce deep harmony out of raging conflict.

Matthew 5:38-48 NKJV

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' {39} "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. {40} "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. {41} "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. {42} "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. {43} "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, {45} "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. {46} "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? {47} "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? {48} "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Romans 12:17-21 NKJV)

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. {18} If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. {19} Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. {20} Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." {21} Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

4. Read Proverbs until you know it backwards.

There is so much wise advice on problem solving and human nature in this one book of the Bible that it is amazing. For instance when I was called into help with an industrial dispute I prayed beforehand and the Scripture.

Proverbs 22:10 NIV

Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended" came to mind. That was just what that situation needed and fair but firm disciplinary action against the troublemaker brought peace to the workplace. Proverbs is an invaluable source of wisdom that has proven itself over time. Derek Kidner's commentary in the Tyndale series is excellent.

5. Study how to say things. How something is worded is vitally important.

Proverbs 25:11-13 NKJV

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver. {12} Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear. {13} Like the cold of snow in time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

Whatever you say should be clear, kind, true and appropriate. There is a right time and a right way to say things that is learned by practice and the study of people. Never lie, never muddle about, never forget you are speaking to a fellow human being with feelings and choose your time and place and manner with care. It can make all the difference in the world.

6. Do not use emotional or forceful language or "legal sounding" words.

Phrases such as "cease and desist" just make you sound pompous and overbearing. Subjugate your desire to make your point to your desire to communicate in a clear and profitable way that will bring the results you want out of the negotiation. Never threaten legal action in a secular court against a fellow believer.

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 NKJV

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? {2} Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? {4} If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? {5} I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? {6} But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! {7} Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? {8} No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

7. Do not be too harsh or absolute.

Proverbs 15:1 NKJV

A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. Don't go in like a dogmatic bull in a china shop.

Proverbs 12:18 NKJV

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.

Proverbs 25:15 NKJV

By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone. Be gentle, reasonable, merciful pure, full of good fruits.

James 3:16-18 NIV

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. {17} But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. {18} Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

8. Act soon and keep it small.

Proverbs 17:14 NKJV

The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.

For this to be the case you may have to undergo a cultural change whereby you cease stuffing your anger down inside you until you "blow up or blow over". Unless people are confronted with their wrong behaviors they most likely will not change. And we are more likely to learn from a gentle reminder than an all out blazing row which necessitates the use of all our defensive capabilities. If

you are in a church or Christian organization then institute gentle and regular correction as a part of the "corporate culture" so that it becomes an easily accepted part of life. Do not involve others unless they need to be involved.

This is the basic wisdom behind the three stage process in Matthew 18 and Jesus' exhortation on a number of occasions to "go to your brother in private, if he listens to you then you have won him". Once others are involved it is much harder to change your mind without losing face. Also facts tend to be altered a little to garner support.

9. Avoid angry and easily disturbed people. If possible keep them out of the process.

Proverbs 29:22 NKJV

An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.

Proverbs 15:18 NKJV

A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.

10. Pay attention to the moral character of the people involved and only rely on humble people of integrity and faithfulness to help you in the peacemaking process.

Proverbs 28:25 NKJV

He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered. Many who wish to become involved are unsuitable because they are gossips, or unreliable in some other way.

Proverbs 16:28-30 NKJV

A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends. {29} A violent man entices his neighbor, And leads him in a way that is not good. {30} He winks his eye to devise perverse things; He purses his lips and brings about evil.

Proverbs 11:12-13 NKJV

He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, But a man of understanding holds his peace. {13} A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

11. Do not forget that in Christian circles many conflicts have the Accuser of the brethren as the primary cause.

In such cases "we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities in the heavenly realms.". The mocker who needs to be "driven out" may be Satan himself. Thus we need to look beyond personalities to the spiritual forces which are taking advantage of their weaknesses and preconceptions just as Satan took advantage of Peter's concept of the messiah at Caesarea Philippi. (Matthew 16:21-23)

When this happens good people can be used for bad purposes. Thus we need to be spiritually alert and keen to "maintain the bond of peace". Good teaching, prayer in the Spirit on all occasions and holy living will give us an impenetrable armour against such schemes. (Eph 6:10-21)

12. Be strong and courageous on the basis of God's word.

Before Joshua took on the military conquest of Palestine he was told.

Joshua 1:8-9 NKJV

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. {9} "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Godly courage solves many giant sized problems.

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