

DOCTRINE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- I. Introduction.
 - A. The fact that conflict is a regular part of life should come as no surprise to any believer. Prov. 30:33
 - B. In fact, the creation of volition is the one necessary action that makes conflict possible; there could be no conflict without volition.
 - C. When Satan fell, choosing to exercise his volition in opposition and antagonism to the sovereignty of God, the angelic conflict began. Isa. 14:13-14
 - D. With the temptation and fall of man, the angelic conflict became a reality for the duration of human history. Gen. 3:1ff
 - E. Jesus briefed His disciples on the fact that His mission was not one designed to bring peace, since He brought and maintained a position that was in antagonism to that of Satan, the ruler of this world. Matt. 10:34; Jn. 14:30
 - F. Conflict (derived from the Latin *conflictus*) is defined as a striking together, two objects that meet in a collision or competition.
 - G. Conflict occurs when individual volitions have differing opinions as to how a matter or issue in life is to be handled.
 - H. It should be obvious that the negative person experiences and causes conflict by virtue of the fact that they are engaged in conflict with God. ISam. 2:10; Isa. 41:11
 - I. Conflict, in and of itself, is not necessarily bad or evil (any more than volition is bad or evil), it may yield productive results when handled according to biblical principles.
 - J. Those who seek to avoid conflict have just as much possibility of being successful as those who seek to avoid the fact that volition exists.
 - K. The issue that separates a successful person from an unsuccessful person, or a mature person from an immature person, is the method by which he deals with the reality of conflict.
 - L. In fact, some unbelievers may be more mature and successful, humanly speaking, due to their ability to understand and apply the principles of conflict resolution.
 - M. It is clearly God's will for the adjusting believer to resolve conflicts and not to engage life in a state of inner turmoil or external antagonism. Col. 3:15; Rom. 12:18
 - N. The Bible makes it quite clear that each believer has personal responsibilities in matters of conflict and the resolution of conflict. Rom. 12:18; Matt. 5:23-24
 - O. To this end, the biblical principles of conflict resolution are contained in this doctrine..
- II. Identify those involved in the conflict.
 - A. The first issue that confronts the believer is correctly identifying those involved in the conflict.

- B. While there are principles that govern our conduct with believers and with unbelievers, one must take into consideration whether they are dealing with a believer or an unbeliever.
- C. It should be obvious that we are going to have a certain amount of conflict with unbelievers by virtue of the fact that we are positive believers living in the Devil's world.
 - 1. Persecution of the righteous by the unrighteous is a fact made clear throughout the Old and New Testament. Ps. 37:12; IITim. 3:12; Jms. 5:6
 - 2. These attacks may take the form of mental attitude hatred, they may be expressed in verbal assaults, or they may ultimately go overt. Ps. 34:21; IPet. 2:12; Acts 7:58-59
 - 3. The believer should be prepared for any sort of persecution by an unbeliever and not be taken aback when it occurs. IPet. 4:12
 - 4. If your conflict is with an unbeliever, you should make certain that you have done nothing to precipitate the antagonism. IPet. 4:15
 - 5. Whether dealing with unbelievers or negative believers, it is not necessarily the will of God for the positive believer to accept anything and everything they do, there is a time and place for standing up for yourself with doctrine. Gen. 31:36; Acts 16:36-37; 24:10-13
- D. If your conflict is with a believer, you must determine if you are dealing with a negative believer.
 - 1. If a problem arises with a negative believer, it is a good possibility that they are not going to apply doctrinal principles in order to facilitate resolution of the conflict. Phil. 3:18-19
 - 2. Since doctrine does not govern their thinking in major areas (such as attendance in Bible class, separation, SG₃, etc.) it is very likely that doctrine does not govern their thinking in minor issues.
 - 3. As much as it lies with you, live in peace with negative believers, being careful not to compromise doctrine in order to maintain peace, standing up for yourself when it is appropriate.
- E. If your conflict is with a positive believer in the local church, more stringent principles apply since the unity of the local church is a very high priority in the Word of God. Eph. 4:2-3
- F. The relative authority of each person involved must be taken into account as well.
 - 1. Bonafide authorities include:
 - a. The establishment chain of command, the government. Rom. 13:1ff
 - b. The royal chain of command, the pastor-teacher and deacons. Heb. 13:17
 - c. The husband. Eph. 5:22-24
 - d. Parents. Eph. 6:1-3
 - e. Other designated authorities, teachers, etc. IPet. 2:13
 - 2. If you are a bonafide authority, the conflict may be nothing more than a person rejecting the authority God has delegated to you.
 - a. There are a very few instances in which conflict with an established authority is appropriate. Ex. 1:17; Acts 5:19

3. If you are under the authority, the possibility exists that you may be rejecting an authority that God has established for you.
 - a. Unless there is a clear biblical mandate, this is seldom appropriate.
 - G. The more mature believer should recognize that immature believers are going to engage in, and are characterized by, a certain amount of unnecessary conflict. ICor. 1:11, 3:3
- III. Identify the issue(s) that form the conflict.
- A. Once a believer has determined with whom he is dealing, he must next determine what issue(s) forms the basis for the conflict.
 - B. This, of necessity, means that the believer must be intellectually honest and objective, seeking to determine if the conflict was originated by himself or by the other person.
 - C. Given human predilections, the believer must not be too quick to dismiss the possibility that the conflict arose because of him, imputing all problems and hostility to the other party.
- IV. Determine the severity of the issue before God.
- A. The believer must spend some time seeking to determine the nature of the issue he faces before he acts.
 - B. Some issues are simply not worth our time and should be recognized as inconsequential. I Tim. 6:20
 - C. Other issues have doctrinal ramifications and must be addressed for the good of one, or both, of the parties involved. Acts 15:1ff
 - D. Reactionary people tend to think that all issues are earth shattering and must be addressed immediately, allowing neither time for God to operate nor believers the freedom to deal with the issue under their own priesthood.
 - E. They tend to address every deviation (doctrinal or not) and often seek to bully people into a resolution of their own making.
 - F. This is obviously inappropriate, at odds with the manner in which God generally operates. I Thess. 5:14d; II Pet. 3:9
 - G. The believer that does not address conflicts and assumes a passive approach toward every issue is equally at odds with the scriptural model.
 - H. They take the “*live and let live*” motto to an extreme that is not healthy, failing to address conflicts and moving to resolve them.
 - I. An example of this is parents that do not address obvious STA failings in their children, refusing to deal with their problems and administering proper biblical discipline. Prov. 22:15 cf. I Kings 1:6
- V. Identify the biblical course of action.
- A. Having properly identified the person and issue involved, the next step is to seek God’s guidance through prayer and apply any scripture that addresses the conflict.
 - B. The overriding principle that must govern our demeanor and approach toward all conflicts is found in Romans 12:18. I Cor. 6:7

- C. This means that we are to expect a certain amount of conflict based on the fact that people are going to do us wrong, either knowingly or unknowingly.
- D. Our reaction to most slights/conflicts/mistakes is to absorb the blow and move on, faith resting the issue to God. Ps. 35:1; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13
- E. Particularly when dealing with negative unbelievers, or negative believers, we are to commit the issue to God and recognize that a certain amount of undeserved suffering will come our way. Gen. 26:20-22; IPet. 4:19
- F. If the issue is one that you simply cannot forgive, and you feel must be addressed, the Bible states that you are to go to the individual privately. Matt. 18:15; Lev. 19:17
 - 1. This is in agreement with the principle of privacy.
 - 2. It also conforms to the principle of grace, allowing the offending party the opportunity to deal with the matter himself.
 - 3. This also eliminates the normal approach of gossip, slander, etc., things that proceed from a bad mental attitude, as believers seek to involve others and win them to their viewpoint. Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; IPet. 2:1
 - 4. If the person acknowledges the problem, conflict resolved!
 - 5. If the person refuses to acknowledge the problem, you must determine the severity of the problem before proceeding.
 - a. If the problem is not one for which the church would remove a believer, you must be willing to be wronged and forgive that believer and move on. ICor. 6:7
 - b. If the problem is so gross as to demand church involvement, you may proceed to the next level.
 - 6. It should be noted that even in serious matters the goal is to win the offending party back to the truth, not to engage in personal vendettas.
- G. The next step occurs when a person refuses to deal with the sin you have presented, rejecting your charge against them. Matt. 18:16; Deut. 19:15
 - 1. Assuming private confrontation does not resolve the problem, the believer is then to enlist the aid of one or two witnesses.
 - 2. At this point, the offending party forfeits the strict right of privacy.
 - 3. The purpose in taking others is to confirm to the offending party that this is a serious issue that does not concern you alone.
 - 4. If he changes his mind, conflict resolved; if not, you may move to a more public forum.
 - 5. This is not the approach one should take in minor matters, only in matters where the integrity of the body is at stake.
- H. The final step occurs when one must make a sin public before the leadership of the church. Matt. 18:17
 - 1. All privacy is now forfeited, the issue moves into the public arena.
 - 2. The offended party must take the conflict to the leadership of the church, and they must deal with the matter, beginning with an investigation and culminating with a public inquiry and decision.
 - 3. The witnesses must be consistent in their testimony, and the guilty party is given a final chance to change his mind.

4. If he refuses to acknowledge the sin, the leadership has no choice but to recommend removal from the assembly.
 5. At this point, all the membership of the church is instructed to separate from this person.
 6. This does not allow for abuse and persecution of the offending believer, but does allow the person to return pending future repentance. IIThess. 3:14-15
- I. This process makes it quite clear that Jesus expected believers to follow conflicts through to their resolution, not allowing issues to fester and provide a **root of bitterness**. Heb. 12:15
 - J. Further, it should be clear that the decision of the church leadership is final and all parties are expected to abide by it. Matt. 18:18
 1. While you may take offense over issues that are not serious (in a sinful sense), it is clear that removal from the church requires an offense of some gravity. ICor. 5:1,11ff
 2. Hence, you should not appeal to this process, beyond step one, for petty or less serious offenses.
 - a. Example: a believer owes you money and will not pay, or a believer has maligned someone. Matt. 18:28
 3. Marital problems do not demand that the leadership of the church get involved unless there is other, sinful activity involved.
- VI. Things that do not encourage or enhance conflict resolution.
- A. It is obvious that the modus operandi of the negative unbeliever tends to encourage and spread conflict. Prov. 6:14
 - B. Certainly, association with these types of people, in violation of the doctrine of separation will likely have an adverse effect on the mental attitude of the believer. Prov. 6:19
 - C. Mental attitude hatred, unresolved issues that the believer allows to fester, is sure to lead to overt conflict. Prov. 10:12
 - D. The believer that is arrogant, rejecting the appropriate reproofs and rebukes that come from sound doctrine will live in conflict. Prov. 13:10, 28:25
 - E. The person that allows STA anger to rule their life will find themselves causing and enduring conflict. Prov. 15:18, 26:21, 29:22, 30:33
 - F. Verbal sinning, such as slander, gossip, maligning, etc., even by a third party can bring conflict into a peaceful situation. Prov. 16:28
 - G. Monetary blessings, the details of life in abundance, are worthless in a home in which conflict reigns. Prov. 17:1
 - H. Busybodies, those people that feel they must be in on, or comment on, every situation do nothing to aid in conflict resolution. Prov. 26:17
 - I. Conflict and strife are indicative of general STA rule in the life. Gal. 5:20
 - J. Engaging in conflict with negative religious types is unprofitable. Phil. 1:15; ITim. 6:4; Tit. 3:9

- VII. Conclusions.
- A. While conflict is a normal and expected part of the Christian way of life, God has provided methods for us to resolve conflicts.
 - B. Neither believers, nor the local church, are to be characterized by internal and external conflicts that continue unresolved indefinitely.
 - C. Inner peace and external tranquility are the goals.
 - D. Most conflicts are truly minor, not some issue of sin that would require a believer to be excommunicated from the church.
 - E. For most conflicts, the answer is something new, dramatic and unusual; it is called open and honest communication.
 - F. Those who refuse this very valuable tool in conflict resolution are likely destined to end up frustrated, holding grudges, bitter, engaging in inappropriate mental, verbal and overt activities.
 - G. Serious matters of sin, whether directed toward you personally or toward someone else, must be dealt with by the church, when necessary.
 - H. In all conflicts the goal is to follow the issue through to resolution, not allowing problems to fester, creating bad attitudes, involving others inappropriately, holding grudges indefinitely, etc. Heb. 12:14-15
 - I. We are not to adopt a *'peace at any price'* mentality, allowing ourselves to be intimidated or bullied by those who actually have the real problems.
 - J. Neither are we to engage in *'crusader arrogance'*, assuming we can right all the wrongs and solve all the problems in the world.
 - K. Further, one should recognize that God can use conflicts to facilitate spiritual growth in an area where we may be weak. Gen. 13:7ff
 - L. The example of Paul and Barnabas, two men that engaged in a serious conflict, demonstrates that believers can and should rise above personal conflicts and focus on the work at hand. Acts 15:37-40
 - M. When we find ourselves in conflict situations, we should consider the example of Jesus **who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.** Heb. 12:3; IPet. 2:23
 - N. This doctrine must be harmonized with other doctrines such as righteous anger, contending for the faith, legitimate self-defense, etc.