

IN CONFLICT: GET THE LOG OUT

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There's more at stake in a conflict than just your rights or grievances; also at stake are the reputation of Jesus and the witness of the church.

Defining the Task

Conflict, which may be defined as "any opinion or purpose that frustrates my goals or desires," is inevitable. We learned last week that it is not *accidental* (from God's sovereign point of view), but an *assignment* for growth. How we respond when conflict arises is critical to the outcome.

There are three possible types of responses to conflict:

1. Peace-Faking (Denying)
2. Peace-Breaking (Attacking)
3. Peace-Making (Restoring)

Peacemaking focuses on restoring relationships—with God, first, and with one another, second.

How important is peacemaking to God?

Peace is part of God's character and one of the great blessings He gives to those who follow Him. He repeatedly commands His people to seek and pursue peace. God describes His covenant with humankind in terms of peace. He taught His people to use the word *peace* (Hebrew, *shalom*, and Greek, *eirene*) as a standard form of greeting and parting. And the coming Christmas season reminds us that He sent His Son to "*guide our feet into the path of peace*" (Luke 1:79).

Peace in 3D

Peace comes to us in three dimensions through Christ: peace with God, peace with one another, and peace within ourselves. The latter is the one everyone is seeking and most are focused on.

But the fact is, if you are not at peace with God, you also will not be at peace with others or with yourself. Why? Because God is the centerpiece of every life, whether we acknowledge Him or not. He made us for Himself, and without Him we are incomplete and discontent. And peace with God does not come automatically.

The good news is that "*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16)

Colossians 1:19-20 *For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in [Christ], and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things...by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.*

Yet, it is possible to make peace with God by trusting Jesus Christ to forgive you and lead you, and still neglect to keep peace with others. This, too, will prevent finding peace within yourself. Peace with others is not simply the absence of conflict and strife, but what the Bible calls unity—the presence of genuine harmony, understanding, and good will. And as we have seen, such unity is an essential part of an effective Christian witness.

This is why Jesus emphatically taught: *“If you bring an offering and there discover that your brother...”*

The reason inner peace is so elusive is that you can't obtain it directly; it is the gift God grants to those who entrust themselves to His Son; it is the fruit of righteous living.

Isaiah 26:3 *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You.*

Isaiah 32:17 *The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.*

Peace with God, peace with others, and peace with ourselves are a single package. If you want to experience inner peace, you must seek harmony with God and with those around you.

The old saying is true: It takes two to fight. When our boys were young they argued with each other over their rights and privileges. When I intervened, one would claim superiority by declaring, “He started it!” My typical response was, “I don't care who started it; I want to know who's going to *stop* it.”

Each person in an argument has the power to carry it forward or to bring it to a halt. The Christian has the calling to make peace.

Clarifying the Objective

Galatians 6:1 *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* ² *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Please note that the ultimate objective is not correction, but restoration. It is not a big deal to correct someone who has misbehaved; children can do that. What's really important (and more difficult) is to restore broken relationships. This is what God is after.

John 17:20 *“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.”* ²¹ *I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*

However, in order to get to restored relationship, some preliminary steps must first be taken.

Underscoring the Attitude

Peacemaking always begins by focusing on God and His concerns, as I described last week. See that Paul underscores this in Galatians 6:1 by assigning this important task of restoration only to those “who are spiritual.” He does not mean “religious,” but full of the Spirit, or under the Spirit's control. Only when God is first and foremost in your heart and mind and tongue can restoration be successful.

Elaborating the Method

Next, you should focus on yourself—examine your attitudes and evaluate your faults and responsibilities in the situation. If you don't, you may find yourself slipping into a similar sin (more about this in a minute).

Matthew 7:3 “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

This passage does not forbid confrontation, as some imagine, but it does forbid *premature and improper* confrontation. Before you talk to others about their faults, you need to face up to your own.

The Nature of a Matter

The nature of a speck and a log is the same; they are the same material, only different in scale.

The reason you are so easily and persistently bothered by the speck in your brother’s eye is often because it reflects the log in your own. Because you have wrestled with a particular weakness, you are familiar with it—with its shades of appearance and its masks. That familiarity makes you an ace at spotting the same weakness in others.

Just because their weakness and yours are related, you must watch yourself, lest you are snared by it again. We recognize this temptation when we choose to steer clear of some people because of their bad habits. By the same token, we must be careful whenever we choose to draw near to them to correct them.

Prepare With Humility

We best prepare for loving confrontation if we pause to reflect on our own susceptibilities, remember the grace God has given us to overcome them, and pray for His wisdom and protection. Be filled with the Spirit when you undertake the task to correct and restore a friend!

To be filled with the Spirit, we must first empty ourselves.

Philippians 2:5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges [literally: emptied himself]; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Dealing With the Hard Stuff

To empty ourselves, we must deal with the difficult matter of repentance—recognizing our own unlikeness to Jesus and changing our minds about our previously permitted bad habits.

Ephesians 4:29 Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Not that you must have perfect behavior before you can speak out against mistreatment or injustice (we're all continually working toward that), but you must have the *right attitude* before you can be effective. You must demonstrate active humility.

Recognizing your own contribution to the conflict—how you stimulated it or encouraged it or exacerbated it or prolonged it—is essential. Only then will you earn the right and gain the compassionate clarity to offer loving correction to your friend.

Tears of repentance are an amazing spiritual cleanser! Washing away the logjam of personal denial, and clarifying our loving sight of those with whom we have conflict.