

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

Conflict in marriage is common, and left unresolved proves destructive. But the Cross brings hope to our life's deepest conflicts. Because of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross to reconcile us to God, we can be restored to right relationship with him, and as a result receive grace to live in harmony with one another. The Bible tells us that God is conforming us to the image of his Son, and he is working redemptively in our conflicts.

A. God Has Made a Way For Us to be at Peace With Him

1. *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Rom. 5:10)*
2. *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Col. 1:19-22)*

Your conflict with your spouse is not your greatest problem. Your alienation from God is your greatest problem. And if you are in Christ, that alienation is removed. God is no longer against you, but for you. In love, he gave his Son so that your greatest relational conflict would be removed eternally. It's our reconciliation with God that gives us the hope we need for our marriages. And it's the same Spirit who has regenerated us who is now at work in us transforming us.

B. Peace With God is the Basis for Us to Live in Peace and Harmony With Others

1. *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)*
2. *So the let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Rom. 14:19)*

I. CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE

A. Two sinners (offspring of Adam)

B. Two different people

1. Possible disagreements
 - a. Ideas
 - b. Opinions
 - c. Preferences
 - d. Tastes
2. Possible responses
 - a. Co-exist
 - b. Compromise
 - c. Collaboration
 - d. Conciliation

II. CONFLICT CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

- A. Disagreement: to be of a different opinion
- B. Conflict: contest; race; struggle (for or against something)
- C. Fight/ Quarrel: fight (2 Tim. 2:23); war, battle (Jas. 4:1)

- D. Devour: to exploit or prey on one another (2 Cor. 11:20)
Has the aspect of biting and consuming (Gal. 5:15)
- E. Strife: contention; the expression of enmity (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor.1:11)
- F. Divisions: discord; breaking up as of family ties (Lk. 12:51)

III. CONFLICT CAN BE BENEFICIAL (ROMANS 8:28-29)

- A. Reveals the sinful desires and passions in our hearts leading to repentance (Jam. 4:1-2)
- B. Opportunity for humility and grace and fruit
- C. Leads to Scripture to discern heart and renew mind (Heb. 4:12)
- D. Stirs us to seek God in prayer (Jam. 1:5)
- E. Opportunity to demonstrate servanthood
- F. Reveals the quality of a man's love and leadership
- G. Reveals the quality of a woman's love and submission
- H. Works for our good (Rom. 8:28)
- I. Tests our faith and produces character (Jam. 1:2-4)
- J. Develops understanding, harmony and intimacy

IV. CONFLICT BEGINS WITH THE DESIRES OF OUR OWN HEARTS (James 4: 1-4)

- A. Conflict begins with a DESIRE (craving, lust) battling in our own heart
- B. The desire in our heart is confronted with DISAGREEMENT or DISAPPOINTMENT
- C. Perhaps the disappointed heart believes that the desire is DESERVED (or that he or she deserves better)
- D. That which our heart thinks of as deserved is then DEMANDED

- E. The demand comes from the heart feeling a vital DEPENDENCY on the desire rather than on God
- F. That on which our heart depends, our heart DEIFIES (becomes our functional god)
- G. That which our heart deifies eventually DESTROYS our relationships, and us because it is a false god...an idol, and it separates us from the Lord who is God!

V. CONFLICT CAN and MUST BE RESOLVED

A. The Heart of a Peacemaker – *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)*

1. Humility
2. Gentleness
3. Patience
4. Forbearance
5. Eagerness (diligence)

B. The Priorities of a Peacemaker

1. Loving, pleasing and honoring God
 - *...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1: 10)*
2. Seeking conviction
 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139: 23-24)*
3. Loving correction
 - *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. (Prov.3: 11-12)*

4. Humbling self
 - *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:6-7)*
5. Removing log from own eye
 - *"Judge not, that you be not judged... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matt. 7:1,5)*
6. Growth in conformity to the image of Christ
 - *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8: 28-29)*
7. Complete restoration, harmony and intimacy
 - *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.. (Eph. 5: 31-32)*

C. The Practice of a Peacemaker

1. A peacemaker will not...
 - a. Assume
 - *Through presumption comes nothing but strife, But with those who receive counsel is wisdom. (Prov. 13:10)*
 - b. Compete
 - *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself (Phil. 2:3)*
 - c. Resign
 - *With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:2-3)*
 - d. Avoid
 - *The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted. (Prov. 29:25)*

e. Manipulate

- *Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2: 4)*

f. Blame

- *The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." (Gen. 3: 12)*

g. Excuse

- *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Ps. 51: 3-4)*

2. A peacemaker will.....

a. Listen and make every effort to understand

- *The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water but a man of understanding will draw it out. (Prov. 20:5)*

b. Focus on the issue at hand

- *Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. (Prov. 4:25)*

c. Guard his heart

- *Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov. 4:23)*

d. Guard his tongue

- *When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.. (Prov. 10:19)*

e. Ask forgiveness specifically

- *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, (Jam. 5:16)*

f. Extend forgiveness completely

- *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)*

g. Provide the help needed

- *and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matt. 7:5)*

- h. Seek help if unable to resolve alone
- *Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. (Prov. 11: 14)*
 - *Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15: 22)*

CONCLUSION

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Col. 3: 12-14)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, EVALUATION and APPLICATION (A)

Answer each question from your own point of view. After answering a question, ask for your spouse's perspective on your response...does he or she agree? disagree?

1. What issue(s) is most often the topic in your conflicts? Describe a recent or typical conflict involving this or another topic.
2. From # 1, what personal desire is being disappointed or disagreed with?
3. What emotional response do you often give to your disappointment?
4. What desires have actually become demands upon your spouse, others, or even upon God?
5. What do you hope to get or avoid by having this desire met?
6. How is what you hope to gain or avoid replacing God as your source?
7. How is this desire now controlling your thoughts and affections? How important has it become?
8. What desires do you now recognize as the source of many conflicts?
9. What should be your response to God?

10. What should be your response to your spouse?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, EVALUATION and APPLICATION (B)

Ask your spouse:

1. In what areas do we have differences of opinion, different preferences or different tastes?
2. How would you describe my response and attitude when we differ on these topics?
3. From the list on **pg. 5-6, C. 1. "A peacemaker will not..."** which of these practices do I often bring into our disagreements? Please explain.
4. How do these responses affect your willingness to disagree with me?
5. What issues are you reluctant to discuss with me because of my responses in the past?
6. From the list on **pg. 4, V. A. "The Heart of a Peacemaker"** which quality would be my strongest? In which attitudes am I weak? Please explain.
7. From the list on **pg. 6-7, 2. "A peacemaker will..."** in which practice am I consistent? In which practice am I deficient? Please explain.
8. Are there aspects of past conflicts that you feel are still unresolved? Please explain.
9. What part did I play in hindering a peaceful and thorough resolution?
10. How does clearly understanding and applying the gospel affect prevention and/or resolution of conflict?

11. Will you forgive me for failing in these areas of resolving our differences and conflicts?:

a. _____

b. _____

Are there other ways in which I have failed?

Will you please forgive me for these as well?