

Handling Conflict Biblically

Get the Log Out of Your Eye

Adapted from The Peacemaker by Ken Sande, Chapters 4-6¹

Review: The Four “G’s” of Peacemaking

- **The Slippery Slope of Conflict**
 - One’s approach to conflict generally falls into one of three categories:
 - Escape (Peace-Faking)
 - Attack (Peace-Breaking)
 - Peace-Making
 - Peacemaking responses are further categorized as **personal** and **assisted**.
 - Personal peacemaking responses may feel more “costly” upfront (humility, willingness to extend forgiveness, etc.), but typically reap lasting dividend and preserve the relationship.
 - One’s attitude toward conflict can reframe one’s approach.
 - Our aim: See conflict as a way to glorify God and benefit all parties involved.
- **Conflict Defined:** A difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.
 - Not all conflict is bad or inherently sinful.
 - Some conflict will naturally arise anytime lies are confronted with truth.
 - Much conflict is caused by sinful heart conditions that are manifested through hurtful words, actions, and attitudes.
- **The Four “G’s” of Peacemaking:**
 - Glorify God
 - *How can I please and honor God in this situation?*
 - Get the Log Out of Your Eye
 - *How can I show Jesus’ work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?*

¹ Sande, Ken. 2004. *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. Baker Books.

- Gently Restore
 - *How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?*
- Go and Be Reconciled
 - *How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?*

Is This Really Worth Fighting Over?

- **Jesus' Instructions on Conflict**

- **Matthew 7:3-5** ³ *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?* ⁴ *Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?* ⁵ *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.*
- Sometimes, this passage is misunderstood to mean we shouldn't address others' faults. This passage does not forbid loving correction; instead, it forbids premature and improper correction.
- Jesus wants us to face your own faults *first* before we face the faults of others.
- Once we've dealt with *our contribution(s)* to a conflict, we can approach others with theirs.
- Examine your role in the conflict:
 - Do I have an **overly sensitive attitude**, being offended too easily?
 - Have I committed a **sinful behavior**?
 - Addressing our attitudes and behaviors is a helpful first step in conflict resolution.

- **Defining the Issues**

- To evaluate your role in a conflict, it's helpful to clearly define the issues separating you from the other parties.
- There are generally two kinds of issues: *material* and *personal*.
 - **Material:** Money, property, rights, responsibilities. These issues might be expressed through questions such as: Where do we spend vacation? Should we build a new church building? How much money does Ted owe Sue?
 - **Personal:** Issues relating to what goes on inside or between persons. This involves attitudes and feelings that result from how one's been treated. For example, "I'm upset about your lying about me." "I'm sure he's trying to cheat me." "She's stubborn and unreasonable."

- In most conflicts, both material and personal matters are in view, and both feed on and aggravate the other.
- You often cannot resolve material issues until you resolve personal issues.
- Before each category of issue spirals out of control, try to identify the material and personal issues at hand. Then, ask the question, “Is this really worth fighting over?”
- If it is an issue that needs to be addressed, be prepared to navigate between material and personal concerns, as one area may need addressed before another can be handled.
- **Overlooking Minor Offenses**
 - In many situations, the best way to resolve conflict is by overlooking the personal offenses of others.
 - **Proverbs 19:11** *Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.*
 - **Proverbs 17:14** *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.*
 - **Colossians 3:12-13** ¹² *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ 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.*
 - Overlooking wrongs is a way to imitate God’s love toward us; he does not treat us as our sins deserve! (Psalm 103:8-10)
 - When is it appropriate to overlook offenses?
 - **Condition 1:** The offense should not have created a wall between you and the other person or caused you to feel differently toward him or her for more than a short period of time.
 - **Condition 2:** The offense should not be causing serious harm to God’s reputation, to others, or to the offender.
 - This is not merely a passive process; it’s an active step inspired by the gospel of God. To overlook means to not dwell on it, save it for future attack, or allow for bitterness to take root.
- **Checking and Changing our Attitude**
 - Often, the difficulty in overlooking an offense stems from an overly sensitive attitude and/or dwelling on what others have done.
 - In Philippians 4:2-9, Paul provides a helpful formula for examining our attitudes in conflict:
 - **Philippians 4:2-9** ² *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have*

labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

○ **Five Principles for Adopting a Proper Attitude in Conflict**

▪ **Principle 1 – Rejoice in the Lord Always**

- Our call is to be joyfully God-centered in our conflict.
- How do we maintain a heart of joy in the Lord in the midst of conflict?

▪ **Principle 2 – Let Your Gentleness Be Evident to All**

- The word “gentleness” in Greek is rich with meaning: forbearing, large-hearted, gentle, courteous, considerate, generous, lenient, moderate.
- Opposite: irritable, ride, abrasive.
- Gentleness is especially helpful in uncovering underlying stress in the one who’s wronged you.

▪ **Principle 3 – Replace Anxiety with Prayer.**

- We cannot just “stop” being anxious; we must replace it with a Godly discipline.
- When you place your focus on God through prayer, the hostility, anxiety, and inner conflict give way to peace and trust. This is a peace Paul says “surpasses understanding”.

▪ **Principle 4 – See Things as They Really Are.**

- If you respond to conflict like most, you will tend to focus on the negative characteristics of the other person, exaggerating his/her faults and overlooking his/her virtues.
- This leads to a distorted view, assuming the worst about another, and a spirit of complaint and/or judgementalism.
- To fight this tendency, focus on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy about the other person. Paul’s not saying we should *only* think about the good

things in others; elsewhere (Galatians 6:1-2; Colossians 3:16) he highlights addressing sin and urging repentance. The goal is to counterbalance our tendency to over-focus on the negative at the expense of the positive.

- **Principle 5 – Practice What You’ve Learned.**

- Paul had dealt with much conflict in the planting and shepherding of churches, and he modeled and shared what he learned. His exhortation is to take what we’ve learned about trusting God in past conflict and apply it to the present conflict in a way that would be a model to others.

- **Sacrificing Our Rights**

- A hard thing to do when peacemaking is sacrificing one’s rights in order to pursue peace.
- Yet, sometimes the best way to make peace in a God-glorifying manner is to not insist on your rights.
 - Parable of the Good Samaritan
 - Abraham giving choice of land to Lot (Genesis 13:5-12)
 - Joseph not bringing justice to his brothers (Genesis 50:19-21)
 - David not punishing Shimei for cursing him when he was fleeing from Absalom (2 Samuel 16:5-12, 19:19-23)
 - Paul sacrificing a right to financial support (1 Corinthians 9:3-15)
 - Jesus sacrificed earthly justice to lay down his life for sinners (1 Peter 2:22-25).
- This does not mean that we never utilize our rights; in fact, the Bible teaches that sometimes it’s appropriate to exercise rights and to hold people fully accountable for their wrongdoing (see Acts 16:35-39; Acts 22:25-29, 25:11).
- When do we lay down our rights? Paul gives us a guiding principle in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, “doing everything for the glory of God.” We can be empowered to lay down our rights if it honors God, advances God’s kingdom, and/or benefits others.

Conflict Starts in the Heart

- God’s Word tells us the source of conflict:
 - **James 4:1-3** *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

- This is an application of what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:19:
- **Matthew 5:19** *For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*
- These passages point to the root cause of conflict: unmet desires in our hearts. When we want something and feel that we won't be satisfied unless we get it, the desire begins to control us. If others fail to meet our desires, we can start to condemn them in our hearts, too.
- As we approach conflict resolution, we must honestly evaluate if something has become an idol in our hearts; conflict is often used by the Lord to root out such idols to direct our affections and trust back to him.
- **The Progression of an Idol**
 - **I Desire**
 - Not all desire is inherently wrong, but can quickly become idolatrous when we perceive a person is standing in the way of that desire.
 - For example: I want peace and quiet when I get home. If someone is standing in the way of that desire (spouse, child, etc.), it may be appropriate to address it lovingly and pursue a path forward together in unity.
 - If a person persistently fails to fulfill your desire, some God-honoring responses include:
 - Trust God and seek your fulfillment in Him (Psalm 73:25)
 - Ask him to grow you and mature you such that the desire being unmet no longer bothers you (James 1:2-4)
 - In love, pray that God sanctifies the other person, waiting for Him to open the door to address it at the proper time while you do good (1 John 4:19-21; Luke 6:27).
 - This course of action *will* lead to blessing from the Lord, and He will use it to conform you into the image of Christ and glorify Himself (Romans 8:28-29).
 - However, in sin, we often respond by fighting to achieve our desire, dwelling on our disappointment, and allowing those emotions to control our thoughts and attitudes.
 - **I Demand**
 - Unmet desires work themselves deeper into our hearts, leading to justification.
 - Sometimes, there's still an element of validity to our claims of justice or fairness at this step. The problem arises if seemingly legitimate desires are not met, we can find ourselves in a cycle: The more we want, the

more we think we deserve it, and the more we think we're entitled to something, the more convinced we are we can't live without it.

- Idols can arise from good desires and wicked desires; even good desires can sour our hearts if they become demands in order to be fulfilled or satisfied.

- **I Judge**

- If we persist in our demanding attitude, it naturally leads to judging others.
- This puts us in the position of God, arbitrating between right and wrong with our desires as the standard!
- Note: It's not always wrong to judge others; in fact, Scripture exhorts us to observe and evaluate others' behavior so that we can respond and minister to them appropriately (see Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1).
- But we begin to sinfully judge when we assess others through the lens of our desires and wishes, characterized by feelings of superiority, indignation, condemnation, bitterness, and resentment.
- The closer we are to others, the more we expect of them; it's easy to move to judgement quickly in the relationships that are closest to us!

- **I Punish**

- Idols always demand sacrifices.
- When someone fails to satisfy, our idol demands that he should suffer. We can quickly move to finding ways to punish people deliberately and unconsciously to get them to conform to our desires.
 - Hurtful words
 - Imposing guilt or shame
 - Physical violence and abuse
 - Withdrawing from relationship
 - Acting cold toward another person, including withholding affection, acting gloomy, or refusing to look him/her in the eye.

- **The Cure for an Idolatrous Heart**

- An idol is something we love, fear, or trust that's not God.
- These are words of worship! And antidote to idolatry generally is to reorient our worship to God (love, fear, and trust Him).
- But specifically, God gives us his Word, his Spirit, and his church to deliver us from specific idols. With humility, allow these means of grace to wash you of your sin.
- Healing process: Repent, Fear, Love, Trust, Delight in God.

Confession Brings Freedom

- In conflict, we must own our contribution (get the log out of our own eye).
- Repentance is the first step in gaining freedom from sin and conflict, and is a gift from God that's empowered by His Spirit.
- Repentance does not mean one is merely sad and uncomfortable, and it involves more than an apology; repentance means to change the way we think.
- Repentance requires waking up to the realities of how we've deceived ourselves and how our ideas, attitudes, values, and goals have been wrong and not glorified God (Ezekiel 14:6; Acts 3:19; 2 Timothy 2:25-26)
- Worldly sorrow isn't sufficient; we must be grieved in how we've sinned against the Lord, agreeing with Him regarding our error, and humbling ourselves in order to receive His grace (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

- **The Seven A's of Confession**

1. **Address everyone involved.**

- a. **Heart sins:** Takes place in the heart and thoughts, doesn't *directly* affect others.
- b. **Social sins:** Words and/or actions that affect other people, including acts of commission or omission. Social sins should be confessed to those who've been affected by them.
- c. **General Principle:** *Your confession should reach as far as your offense.*

2. **Avoid "If, But, and Maybe".**

- a. Don't shift blame to others in a way to minimize your guilt.
- b. Examples:
 - i. *Perhaps* I was wrong.
 - ii. *Maybe* I could have tried harder.
 - iii. I shouldn't have lost my temper, *but I was tired.*
 - iv. Each of these would have value without the italicized words!

3. **Admit Specifically.**

- a. Specific admissions demonstrate to others that you've taken ownership of your role in the conflict, and makes it easier for the other party to forgive you.
 - i. "I know I'm not much of an employee."
 - ii. "I know I've had a negative attitude these last few months, which has led me to be critical of others and disrupt the office."

- b. It's wise to admit specifically that you've violated God's will; this show that you realize it was not a minor error in judgement, but a violation of God's standards.

4. Acknowledge the Hurt.

- a. Acknowledge and express sorrow for how you've hurt or affected the other party.
- b. Sometimes it's helpful to ask the other party how you made them feel as a result of your behavior.
- c. The goal is not to dwell on emotions, but rather to show you've considered the reach of the hurt in their lives.

5. Accept the Consequences.

- a. Accepting the consequences of your actions is another way to demonstrate repentance (Luke 15:19; Luke 19:8).

6. Alter Your Behavior.

- a. Explain how you plan to alter your behavior in the future. This could include specific steps you hope to take to avoid your contribution to the conflict in the future and/or adjustments in attitude or perspective that God has worked in your heart that you hope are evident moving forward.

7. Ask for Forgiveness.

- a. Many times, people will readily forgive.
 - b. Other times, it will take time. You may respond in such cases with something like, "I know I've deeply hurt you, and I can understand why you would have a hard time forgiving me. I hope that you will soon be able to forgive me, because I want very much to be reconciled. In the meantime, I will be praying for you, and will do my best to repair the damage I've caused as quickly as possible with God's help."
- Not every confession will require all seven steps. Minor offenses can often be addressed with a simple statement. The more serious the offense, the more thorough the confession.
 - To be a peacemaker, you need to deal honestly with your contribution(s) to conflict.
 - **2 Timothy 2:21** *Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*
 - Jesus has promised to forgive us and purify us from our sins if we humbly confess them and receive the washing of His grace! (1 John 1:9).