

# What Any Conflict Can Do

Number one in the series: *Make Peace Not War*

*Biblical tools for handling conflict*

January 2 & 3, 2010

## Intro:

I'm starting a new series of messages today. The theme for this first month in 2010 is: *make peace not war!* I think there's enough war among nations and between individuals in this world. As Christians, we're to follow Jesus who was called **the Prince of Peace**. It was prophesied in **Luke 1:79** that he would **guide us into the path of peace**. That's what we need.

For the next 4 weeks, we'll be talking about *how to handle conflict*. While trouble is inevitable in relationships, we can learn and follow biblical principles in order to *not just manage*, but *grow* through conflict.

I'm indebted to Ken Sande and Alfred Poirier (*poy-re-er*) for their books, *The Peacemaker* and *The Peacemaking Pastor*.

My title today is ***what any conflict can do***. You might think, *I know what any conflict can do - it can ruin my day then keep me awake at night*. True, any conflict has the power to tear people apart. Differences can separate friends. Persistent quarrels can split families or churches. And unresolved conflicts can also tear people apart inside. You probably know the gnawing pain of tension and bitterness.

But that's not what I want to say. I want to tell you that any conflict, every conflict, can lead to God being glorified. That's the truth. *Any conflict* can be turned into something that *gives God honor*. That's something that we can choose.

In this series we'll consider *when you should overlook mistreatment* and *when to defend your rights*. We'll discover a *biblical approach to correcting others*. We'll also learn *how to admit it when you're wrong*, and we'll study *the whole issue of forgiveness*. These principles won't make troubles disappear, but they will help us to handle conflict well.

T - First, we should all be aware that...

**1. We will experience conflict.** It is not optional but comes standard with life.

## 1. We will experience conflict.

• **Relational troubles are inevitable.** They are to be expected; they are inescapable, a certainty of life. Conflict is unavoidable. Don't think that if you're a nice person life will be smooth. We are warned in the Bible that we'll be disrespected, even hated! **1 John 3:13 - Do not be surprised...** **1 Peter 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.** *It's not unusual (Tom Jones).* You might even feel like David who wrote: **Ps 40:12 - troubles without number surround me...** The worst troubles are relational ones. People you thought were friends can act like enemies. David experienced this: **Ps 17:11 - They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground.** *Been there?*

Opposition can occur in *any facet of life* and in *any relationship*. It may be that your *neighbor* has strong opinions and doesn't much care about yours. Or the *coach* doesn't see your talent and plays someone else. Or your *sister* acts like she can't stand you. Your *parents* may be controlling. Or maybe your *boss* manipulates you. Maybe *your marriage* is on your mind. *No one lives a trouble free life.*

Picture having a cool car and the guarantee that *not one other car* would be on the road - not even a police car! You could do anything you wanted to do. But as soon as there is *just one other person out there*, you have the possibility of a collision. Their will might run right into yours. What you *think or want or do* can *conflict and collide* with someone else. ***Relational troubles are inevitable. We will experience conflict.***

## 2. We will handle conflict in one way or another.

I'll suggest a couple of common ways we face, or don't face, conflict.

• **Some people tend to play pretend.** They think of *any conflict* as *bad* and therefore try to *avoid* it *at all costs*. And *the cost* can be high when we play pretend. For those taking this way out, the goal is not justice, reconciliation, and harmony, but *feeling okay*. So, in blissful denial, they numb themselves to reality, pasting on a plastic smile.

This method might temporarily smooth a situation, but it is not a healthy way to handle conflict.

Sande's book calls this *faking peace*. When we don't face our problems, they get worse with neglect. A biblical example is Eli in **1 Sam 1-4**. His sons were dishonoring God and he never dealt with them. *Maybe his words wouldn't have done much good*, but he apparently didn't even speak up. *You can't control your adult children, but you can confront them with the consequences of their choices*. Eli didn't even do that and he and his sons paid a high price.

**S** - Some people pretend nothing is wrong and therefore never repair relationships. They **play pretend**.

• **Other people go into attack mode.** This response to conflict contrasts with *faking peace*. Now we're talking about *breaking peace*.

Some view any conflict as *a battle to win*. Those who go into *attack mode* try to make the argument go their way at all costs. This can begin with sarcastic insults and escalate to real combat. Sometimes the slams are aimed straight at opponent, and at other times they are spoken behind backs as gossip. This manner of reacting to conflict is destructive.

A biblical example is King Saul. He felt that David was a threat to his position so he dealt with it by throwing a spear at him! This happened a few times, recorded in **1 Sam 18:11; 19:10**. Then in **20:33**, Saul hurled a spear at his son,

Jonathan, who was speaking up for David. *This is not healthy conflict management!*

**T** - I've mentioned those who *fake peace*, denying any conflict exists, and those who *break peace* by lashing out in hostility and anger. These can be illustrated by thinking of car troubles. Picture your car overheating. Steam is rising; the gauge is redlined. If you *play pretend* that nothing is wrong, you run the risk of the problem leading to worse things like a warped head or blown engine. *Faking peace* isn't smart, but neither is *breaking peace* - going into *attack mode*. When the car starts to overheat, you don't ram it into a wall at high speed. You don't open the hood and empty a clip of ammo into the faulty radiator. *There is an alternative*.

• **There is an alternative.** The alternative to *faking peace* or *breaking peace* is to *make peace*. You can be a *peacemaker*! This means you *keep your head* and *address the issue*. You *work it out*. You *search for solutions* and *resolve the conflict* with both *justice* and *mercy*. When you *decide to follow God's instructions* for relationships, you can *do more than cope*.

The three options are to **bury** the issue, **beat** on the other person, or make it **better**! *Yes, there's a better way than burying the issue or beating on someone*. You don't have to hide or fight anymore. When you understand and obey God's instructions, you'll be able to handle conflict well. Don't think that you have to do things the way you've always done things. Don't settle for the status quo. It's a new year! You can change how you react and respond.

### **3. We can handle conflict in a way that honors God.**

It starts with the realization that disagreement isn't necessarily bad. Differences stimulate dialogue. Conflict can be seen as an opportunity for people to grow closer to God. That glorifies him. **1 Cor 10:31** - *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*. In all things honor God. Your life is *like an arrow* and you decide

which way it *points*. The life glorifying God is one *pointing up* to him. Handle conflict in a way that *points out* his power and reveals his character. *It is easy to react to conflict in a way that betrays that we are only interested in our own glory. But our pattern should be what we read in Ps 115:1 - Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory...*

**T** - Does all this really matter? Let's consider...

• **A cost analysis:** What is at stake? **John 17:20,21** will show us *the importance of resolving conflict*. Peace between people is unity. It is how we prove to the world that Jesus is who he claimed to be. Note that Jesus didn't pray that his followers would always be happy but that we would get along. And *he hung his reputation on us!* If the world could see harmony between unified Christians, that would serve as a proof that the gospel is true. But the opposite, our unresolved conflict, seems to *disprove the claims of Christ*. So, **what is at stake?** I'll use a quote to summarize:

Ken Sande - *"When Christians are fighting, our battles overshadow anything we try to tell the world about Jesus."*

*What does this look like?* • **A case study** in **Acts 15:36-42** will show us *the benefit and resolution of a conflict*.

Paul and Barnabas were planning their second missionary journey and *they disagreed* over whether to include John Mark who had bailed out on the previous trip. *The hard-changing Paul* had apparently lost confidence in Mark but *Barnabas*, who was known as an encourager, wanted to give Mark a second chance. *By the way, Col 4:10 tells us they were cousins.* •

Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways. But *don't miss* that this solution *doubled their strength* - now there were *two teams!* And *don't miss* what the rest of the Bible teaches about their relationships after this altercation! Later, Paul wrote positively of Barnabas's ministry in **1 Cor 9:6**. And in **Philemon 24**, Paul called *Mark* his **fellow worker**. In his last letter, **2 Tim 4:11**, right before he died,

Paul asked for Mark's company and referred to him as a **useful helper**. Mark became a close associate of Peter's and was the same Mark to write the gospel account.

Though we see the end results of this conflict, we don't have the details of *how they handled* it. Later in this series we will be studying Scriptures that lay out sequential steps. *What we do see here* is that disagreements, handled well, need not lead to permanent division.

In the coming weeks, we'll see that dealing with conflict God's way can help others. It is a way to serve them. A couple *painful* but *positive* personal examples come to mind. When I was in college, a friend critiqued how I talked to my parents. I didn't like his correction at the time, but he was right. A couple years later, a man confronted me about how I handled myself with girls. *I was humiliated, but I was blessed*. And early in my ministry someone cared enough about me to *push hard* about what was expected in the senior role. It was worth it. These, and *many other* conflicts, have *awakened me to reality* and *made me change*. There is **great benefit** available on the other side of conflict.

**T** - One last thing today: I want to share **a simple truth**. If you're asking, *What should I do first?* Here's

• **A simple truth:** *The first step in making peace with others is to experience peace within. And the first step in experiencing peace within is to experience peace with God.*

You see, our *insecurity, immaturity* and *inconsistencies* are all obstacles to experiencing peace with others. If your life is haphazard and you're full of junk then you'll have a hard time connecting well with others. But if you are calm, whole, stable and healthy, it is much easier to handle conflict. So, that's why I say... **R**. *How does that happen?*

**Rom 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Peace with God** is a gift to receive. We can accept and

apply this good news as soon as we accept the bad news that we need God. We fall short and can't do it alone.

Are you hurting over some conflict in your life right now? You don't have to wonder if God loves you and forgives you for what you've done. That question can be settled. You can give your life to him starting today. Start living the life that points up to him. Make this year different. You don't have to cringe when you talk to God about your troubles. Don't avoid him any longer. When you are right with him it is amazing how many other things start going right. Turning to God for help won't instantly make everything better, but it is a great first step in the right direction. Let's take that step together.

**Prayer.** Team available.