

LECTURE # 8

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Understanding _____.

1. Definition: “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires”¹.
2. Some conflicts can be _____. God has given diversity to the body. Therefore, we should seek unity, not uniformity (Ephesians 4:1-13).
3. Many conflicts are caused by _____ (James 4:1-3).

B. The foundation and motivation for _____.

1. Peace with _____ (Romans 5:1).
2. Called to _____ (Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:18, Ephesians 4:1-3).
3. Ministry of _____ (II Corinthians 5:18).

C. Problems are an _____.

1. To _____ God.
2. To _____ others.
3. To grow in _____.

¹ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), p. 24.

II. _____ TO CONFLICT.

- A. _____ Responses: The three responses found on the left side of the curve are directed at getting away from the conflict situation rather than resolving it.
1. _____: Pretend that a conflict does not exist, or refuse to do what you should do to resolve it properly. This is always a wrong response.
 2. _____: Run away from the person with whom you are having a conflict. This is a legitimate response only when it is presently impossible to resolve the conflict in a constructive manner (see I Sam. 19:9-10).
 3. _____: A person takes his or her own life. This is always a wrong response to conflict.
- B. _____ Responses: The three responses found on the right side of the curve are directed at bringing as much pressure to bear on opponents as is necessary to defeat their claims and eliminate their opposition.
1. _____: A matter is taken before the civil authorities for a decision. At times this is a legitimate response, but it should be used only after exhausting the “work-it-out” responses (with rare exceptions).
 2. _____: Use force or intimidation (physical, verbal, financial, or otherwise) to compel an opponent to give in to your demands.
 3. _____: Kill the person or persons who oppose you. Murder is always wrong.
- C. _____ (work-it-out) Responses: The six responses found on the top portion of the curve are directed at finding a just and mutually agreeable solution to a conflict.
1. _____ an offense: One person deliberately and unilaterally decides to forgive a wrong and walk away from a conflict (Proverbs 19:11, 12:16, 17:14, I Peter 4:8, Colossians 3:13).
 2. _____: Personal offenses are resolved through confession or confrontation, leading to forgiveness and reconciliation (Matthew 18:15, 5:23-24, Galatians 6:1-3, Proverbs 18:13).
 3. _____: Substantive issues are resolved through a bargaining process in which the parties seek to reach a mutually agreeable settlement of their differences through an exchange of promises (Philippians 2:3-4).

4. _____: One or two other people meet with the parties to improve communication and facilitate a voluntary resolution. (Mediators can only suggest solutions and have no power to impose a solution) (Matthew 18:16).
5. _____: When the parties cannot come to a voluntary solution, they explain the matter to one or more arbitrators who are empowered to render a binding decision on the matter (I Cor. 6:1-8).
6. _____: When a Christian party refuses to do what is right and just, the church formally intervenes to promote repentance and reconciliation (Matthew 18:17-20).

III. _____ STEPS.

- A. _____ God (I Corinthians 10:31, Psalm 37:1-6).
- B. Get the _____ out of your own eye (Matthew 7:5).
- C. Go and show your brother his _____ (Matthew 18:15).
 1. Overlook the _____: Proverbs 19:11; 12:16; 17:14; 1Peter 4:8; Colossians 3:13.
 2. Go and talk in _____: Matthew 18:15; Philippians 2:3-4.
 3. Take _____ or _____ others along: Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 6:1-8.
 4. Tell It to the _____: Matthew 18:17.
 5. Treat Him as an _____: _Matthew 18:17-20.
- D. Go and be _____ (Colossians 3:13-14).

Responses to Conflict in the Bible

Indicate which response to conflict was used and whether it was wise (+) or foolish/sinful (-).	
1. Abraham's response to the friction between Sarai and Hagar (Gen. 16:6)	
2. Hagar's response to Sarais persecution (Gen. 16:6-8)	
3. Joseph's response when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (Gen. 39:11-12)	
4. Potiphar's wife's response when Joseph spurned her advances (Gen. 39:13-18)	
5. Pharaoh's response to the plagues God brought upon him (Ex. 7:1-12:36)	
6. Saul's response to David when he won the hearts of the people (1 Sam. 18:1-16)	
7. David's response to Saul's attempts to kill him (1 Sam. 19:9-12)	
8. Solomon's response to the dispute over the prostitute's baby (1 Kings 3:16-28)	
9. Daniel's response to the command to eat unclean food (Dan. 1:8-16)	
10. Jonah's response to God's command to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3)	
11. Joseph's response when Herod was searching for Jesus (Matt. 2:13-15)	
12. Judas Iscariot's response to the inner conflict he felt after betraying the Lord (Matt. 27:5)	
13. The Corinthians' response to legal conflicts with one another (1 Cor. 6:1-8)	
14. The apostles' response to the conflict about distributing food (Acts 6:1-7)	
15. Barnabus' response to the conflict between Saul and the apostles (Acts 9:26-28)	
16. Peter's response when Jewish Christians complained about teaching Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18)	
17. The Philippian slave owners response to Paul (Acts 16:16-22)	
18. Paul's response to Peter's support of circumcision group (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 2:11-21)	
19. Paul's response when charged with crimes in Jerusalem (Acts 24:1-26:32)	
20. The Pharisees' response to Jesus.	
Bonus: God's response to our sin (the Gospel)	

Answers to the Above Sheet

Note: Because the Bible does not give detailed information about some of these situations, it is not always clear whether a particular response was wise or foolish.

1. Abraham's response to the friction between Sarai and Hagar (Gen. 16:6): Denial combined with half-hearted arbitration; foolish.
2. Hagar's response to Sarai's persecution (Gen. 16:6-8): Flight, foolish.
3. Joseph's response when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him (Gen. 39:11-12): Flight; wise.
4. Potiphar's wife's response when Joseph spurned her advances (Gen. 39:13-18): Assault, apparently combined with pressing false legal charges; foolish.
5. Pharaoh's response to the plagues God brought upon him (Ex. 7:1-12:36): Denial; foolish.
6. Saul's response to David when he won the hearts of the people (1 Sam. 18:1-16): Assault and attempted murder; foolish.
7. David's response to Saul's attempts to kill him (1 Sam. 19:9-12): Flight; wise (David ran away to avoid a direct confrontation with Saul).
8. Solomon's response to the dispute over the prostitute's baby (1 Kings 3:16-28): arbitration or litigation (decision by the civil authority); wise.
9. Daniel's response to the command to eat unclean food (Dan. 1:8-16): Negotiation; wise (This is one of the best examples of collaborative negotiation in the Bible, see *The Peacemaker*, pp. 191-2).
10. Jonah's response to God's command to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3): His first response was flight, which was foolish, and then he essentially acquiesced to his own death (1:12), which was tantamount to suicide; again foolish. After he repented, he listened to God (discussion), but then he again fell into denial and a wish for death (4:1-9).
11. Joseph's response when Herod was searching for Jesus (Matt. 2:13-15): Flight; wise.
12. Judas Iscariot's response to the inner conflict he felt after betraying the Lord (Matt. 27:5): suicide; foolish.
13. The Corinthians' response to conflicts with one another (1 Cor. 6:1-8): litigation; foolish.
14. The apostles' response to the conflict about distributing food (Acts 6:1-7): mediation and/or arbitration (their proposed solution "pleased the whole group;" it is unclear whether it was merely a suggestion or a binding decision); wise (good leaders build consensus rather than impose solutions).
15. Barnabus' response to the conflict between Saul and the apostles (Acts 9:26-28): mediation; wise.
16. Peter's response when Jewish Christians complained about teaching Gentiles (Acts 11:1-18): discussion and negotiation; wise.
17. The Philippian slave owners' response when Paul's delivered the woman from spiritual bondage (Acts 16:22-40): Litigation (unjust use of civil processes), resulting in assault; foolish.

18. Paul's response to Peter's support of circumcision group (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 2:11-21): Discussion, followed by an appeal to church arbitration and discipline (counsel at Jerusalem); wise.
19. Paul's response when charged with crimes in Jerusalem (Acts 24:1-26:32): Discussion (tried to reason with crowd), with final resort to litigation (civil authorities) after a deliberate choice to bypass church courts, which were stacked against him; wise.
20. The Pharisees' response to Jesus: Initially, they tried to discuss their difference with Jesus, not so much to understand and reason with him, but to trap him. In the end they arrested him and dragged him before a corrupt church court (perverted church discipline), then took him before a corrupt civil ruler (unjust litigation), then joined in a general assault against him (verbal and physical), and finally instigated his murder. All that they did was foolish and sinful. Only Nicodemus responded properly to Christ (discussion leading to conversion).

Bonus: God's response to our sin (the Gospel). God bears with our sin with great patience (Ps. 103:10-18; Rom. 9:22-24), offering and securing for us eternal forgiveness in spite of our many offenses against him. The cost for this mercy was immeasurably great, however. God sent his Son to serve both as a mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) and as our substitute to work out a resolution to the greatest conflict the world has ever known. Jesus willingly went on trial in our place, was convicted for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21), and suffered the flogging, death, and separation that we deserved (Mark 15:34). The Gospel is the most wonderful response to conflict that has ever occurred, but to bring it about, Jesus had to endure the most painful response to conflict that could ever be imagined.

Underlying Attitudes and Behaviors

The following is a diagnostic tool to illuminate attitudes in conflict.

Factors that Cause Us to Slip	Stabilizing Factors
See God as “Santa Claus” (means well but undependable-able or unable to help with the tough problems of life)	See God as Sovereign (God is in control and he is for us; life’s problems are not accidents, but assignments)
See conflict as inherently wrong (“good Christians never fight; they should always have unity and, therefore, should never disagree with one another”)	See conflict as sometimes natural and beneficial (conflict is inevitable and can be used for good; knows the difference between “unity” and “uniformity”)
See conflict as inherently dangerous (conflict is a sign of not caring, could destroy this relationship)	See conflict as an opportunity to strengthen relationships (disagreement is sometimes a sign of caring)
See conflict as inherently neutral (view people as inherently good; “all we need is improved communication and better understanding”)	See that conflict is sometimes the result of sin (willing to deal with “issues of the heart”)
See conflict as a contest (love to debate, always views conflict as “win/lose” situation)	See that it is sometimes right to let others win (“submission” is not a dirty word)
Blur issues and people (relationships suffer; treat opponents coldly and disrespectfully; reluctant to disagree with those you like or respect)	Separate issues and people (disagreement on issues does not impair relationship; willing to respectfully disagree with anyone)
Indirect communication (talk about others, not with them; gossip, slander, and unwholesome talk; sometimes disguised as a “prayer request”)	Direct communication (talk with people, not about them; says “only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it might benefit those who listen”)
Won’t let go of the past (hold grudges; get “historical” about conflict; empty and reload gunny sack; see others’ sins as more serious than their own)	Finds freedom in forgiveness (after offenses are dealt with, records are erased; appreciates the depth of God’s forgiveness and the sufficiency of the cross)
Spiritualize conflict (black/white thinking; “I am being faithful to the Lord; if you disagree with me, you are being deceived or controlled by Satan”)	Genuine spirituality (humility and dependence on God produces real strength, which includes a gentle spirit.)
Self-absorbed (preoccupation with one’s own needs and desires, with being a victim, with blaming others for the problem)	Self-aware (take responsibility for contributions and for its resolution; “I am 100% responsible for my own choices)
Reactive (emotional reactions; attack others’ concerns and opinions without really listening to and reflecting on the merits of their views)	Interactive/responsive (thoughtful responses; careful listening and effort to understand; “I” statements; clarity and charity)
Leaders discourage disagreements and ignore problems (fear controversy; uneasy or intolerant toward challenges to their opinions or authority)	Leaders seek to keep conflict “above ground” (invite respectful disagreement; encourage diversity; lead by example and teaching rather than edict and command)
Problem-focused or solution-focused (prefers to stir the problem indefinitely, or wants to jump immediately to solutions)	Process/Problem/Solution focused (committed to a process that allows a full understanding of the problem and moves on to problem-solving at the right time)
Low tolerance of uncertainty (insists on getting a dispute settled immediately)	Patient (willing to accept uncertainty while gathering information and exploring a variety of solutions)