

## Resolving Conflict

### Chapter 5 – Biblical Principles of Conflict Resolution: Three Types of Conflict

*“The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,”*  
(Proverbs 15:28 ESV)

#### I. Identifying Conflicts

“Conflicts are not all the same. Recognizing this fact is an essential element of being a good conflict resolver.”<sup>1</sup>

- Conflict of Differentness - conflict arising out of our non-sinful differences and idiosyncrasies.
  - Biblical examples: Mark and Paul’s “sharp disagreement” (Acts 15:39); Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2)
  - Contemporary examples: any non-sinful differences in preferences, tastes, styles, and methods.
    - Differences in methodology
      - How a husband loads the dishwasher compared to his wife
    - Non-sinful personal habits or quirks
      - Finger or foot tapping, how much time spent on hygiene, eye contact in conversation, laid back or more formal, talkative vs. quiet, energetic vs subdued, verbal quirks (“totally, ya know?!”)
    - Differences of opinion (e.g. politics)
    - Differences in taste for music, clothing, cars, sports, food, hobbies, animal lover, school choice, home furnishings, house architecture
    - Preferences on climate control
    - Differences in sensitivity to smells and sounds
- Conflict of Sinfulness – a sinful conflict brought about by one or both parties.
  - Biblical examples: Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-6), David and Saul (1 Sam. 18-26); Paul and Peter (Gal. 2:13-14); John and Diotrephes (3 John 9-10).
  - Contemporary examples: husband speaks impatiently with wife and uses sarcasm to belittle her, parents react harshly to their child’s sinful behavior and provoke their child to anger, child hits or says something mean to another child, saying something unkind to another person, gossiping about or slandering another person, verbal and physical abuse, pornography use by a spouse.
- Conflict of Righteousness – conflict brought about by difference of opinion about the righteous thing to do in a given situation or circumstance (disagreement over interpretation and application of the Bible).
  - Biblical examples: vegetarianism vs. omnivore, eating meat sacrificed to idols, viewing certain days as special rather than others (Rom. 14)
  - Contemporary examples: music style in church service, drinking alcohol, tattoos, who to vote for (or not vote for) in elections, mask wearing in accordance with government mandates

1. What will happen to our relationships if we do not differentiate between different types of conflicts?

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<sup>1</sup> Lou Priolo, *Conflict Resolution* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 115.

***“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*** (Ephesians 4:29 ESV, emphasis added)

## **II. Solutions to Conflict**

### **A. Conflicts of Differentness**

“The solution for these conflicts, therefore, is not primarily some form of confrontation about the other person’s sin, but rather the application of loving forbearance.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **Guidelines for Talking to Other Christians About Your Differences<sup>3</sup>**

- “Remind yourself that God made the other person with his own unique personality for his own purposes (which probably have little to do with making life easier for you).”
- “Guard against legalistic and judgmental attitudes that raise non-sin issues to the level of sin.”
- “Focus more on the interests of the other person than on your own interests.”
- “Be reasonable willing to yield to the views and desires of others.”
- “Be willing to put up with annoying traits of others.”
- “Try to determine for whom it is a ‘swing issue’ and for whom it is a ‘fire’ issue.”
- “Allow the peace of Christ to be the referee (or umpire) of the conflict.” (Col. 3:15)

Lisa and Oliver are an unlikely couple in church with drastically different upbringings who have been married for four years. Oliver was raised in a middle-class family on a farm in Greenwood county and Lisa was raised in an upper-class family in Overland Park, Kansas. As you fellowship, you ask Lisa/Oliver about how marriage is going, and she/he shares some complaints about their spouse. They both say it’s harder than they thought. Lisa really enjoys leaving the house to hang out with friends and do various activities. But Oliver, after a hard day’s work, likes to stay at home in the country and enjoy peace and quiet with his family. Oliver doesn’t understand why Lisa is always wanting to plan activities with other people away from home.

2. How could you encourage Lisa and Oliver to view their differences biblically?
3. What are some ways you could encourage Lisa and Oliver to practice preferring one another according to Philippians 2:3-4?

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<sup>2</sup> Priolo, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Priolo, 118-120.

4. How could you encourage Lisa to have peace as she submits to her husband's preferences? (Col. 3:15) How could you encourage Oliver to love Lisa as Christ loved the church with regard to her preferences? (Eph. 5:25)

## B. Conflict of Sinfulness

“The basic solution for conflicts of sinfulness is repentance or change.”<sup>4</sup>

### Four Different Resolution Methods for Conflicts of Sinfulness

- Overlook/cover an offense (Prov. 19:11; 1 Pet. 4:8)
- Correct a sinning brother (Matt. 18:15-18; Lk. 17:3)
- Restore a sinning brother (Gal. 6:1)
- Win your brother (Matt. 18:15)

***“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”*** (1 Peter 4:8 ESV)

***“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,”*** (Luke 17:3 ESV)

5. What would happen to our relationships if we only obeyed Luke 17:3? How can you discern between a time when it's ok to cover someone's sin and when it's an issue that requires you to obey Luke 17:3?
6. What is the goal and motivation of the command in Luke 17:3?

***““If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*** (Matthew 18:15 ESV)

***“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”*** (Galatians 6:1 ESV)

7. What is the motivation of initiating conflict in these two passages?
8. What are some guiding principles in these two verses for the person initiating the conflict?

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<sup>4</sup> Priolo, 116.

## Guidelines for Talking to Other Christians About Their Sin<sup>5</sup>

- “Get the beam out of your own eye first.” (Matt. 7:3-5)
- “Be sure that what the other person has done really is a sin (that ought not to be overlooked).” (1 Peter 4:8)
- “Examine your motives” (Gal. 6:1)
- “Use biblical terminology when talking to others about their sin.”
- “Choose the right time.”
- “Choose the right words.”
- “Be sure that you maintain a gentle spirit throughout the discussion.”

Ken and Cynthia’s son named John just got his drivers license. After spending many hours helping him learn how to drive and teaching him how important it was to obey traffic laws, they felt he was ready and responsible enough to drive on his own to school and work only. But one evening John comes home sheepish and discouraged holding a ticket in his hand. He was going 45 in a 30mph zone. When asked why he was speeding, he said he had stopped at a friend’s house after school, lost track of time, and was running late to get to work. Ken angrily tells John, “You know you are not allowed to drive anywhere else except for school and work. You should not have been at your friend’s house – especially without talking to us first. If you had just obeyed, this wouldn’t have happened! Not only will you pay that ticket, you will also pay any increase in our car insurance and you are not allowed to drive for 2 weeks.” John yells “fine!” and storms away to his bedroom. Cynthia thinks that Ken is overreacting and that the punishment is too severe. She immediately tries to confront Ken’s harshness, but Ken says “the boy needs to understand the severity of what he has done and how dangerous that was.”

9. Later that evening, as Ken calms down, he comes under the conviction that he has sinfully responded to his family in anger. What first steps should Ken take to help resolve the conflict?
10. Ken and Cynthia begin to discuss how to address John’s actions. Cynthia is concerned that Ken is being too severe with the discipline. What might be some questions they could ask and discuss that would help them determine an appropriate level of discipline for John’s actions? What biblical language should they use to describe John’s sin?
11. How can Ken lovingly communicate their motives for discipline to John?
12. If this became a recurring issue for John, with no signs of sorrow for his sin, what would be the next step Ken and Cynthia could take to help in the conflict resolution process?

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<sup>5</sup> Priolo, 126-129.

### C. Conflict of Righteousness

“the basic solution for ‘righteousness conflicts’ is Bible study.”<sup>6</sup>

#### Guidelines for Talking to Other Christians About Righteousness Issues

- “Confess and seek forgiveness for any sinful words, actions, or attitudes that may have exacerbated the conflict up to this point.”
- “Try to express the problem from both perspectives.” (Prov. 18:2, 13, 17)
- “Determine what things can be agreed upon.”
- “In light of the newly discovered biblical data, propose what modifications you are willing to make in order to reach a mutually agreed solution.”
- “If the problem cannot be resolved in the period of time agreed upon by both of you in advance, seek the assistance of a ‘true yokefellow.’”

Oliver and Lisa are in conflict about parenting. Their oldest daughter Kim, who is 14 years old, was recently caught lying about using her cell phone after the evening cut-off her parents designated. Oliver believes she should be disciplined by taking her phone away for two weeks. He is thinking about passages like Proverbs 13:24 that say **“He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he loves him disciplines him diligently.”** Lisa, on the other hand, believes the behavior is a minor offense, and doesn’t want to chastise Kim. She wants to talk to Kim, but thinks about Proverbs 17:10 which says **“A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.”** She is worried about disobeying Ephesians 6:4 and provoking Kim to anger. Oliver and Lisa have been arguing about their different approaches for 15 minutes and have raised their voices at each other.

13. What kind of conflict is happening in this scenario?
14. Once Oliver and Lisa had a chance to reflect on responding to conflict with gentleness, humility, patience, and forbearance, what first step should they take before re-engaging in the conflict that will help set the tone for the rest of the conversation?
15. What are the two different perspectives that Oliver and Lisa have about the problem? Why is this important for them to recognize? (1 Cor. 13:7)
16. What are the elements of the conflict that they agree on together? Why is this important for them to recognize?
17. What are some areas of misunderstanding that proper biblical interpretation would help bring resolution to the conflict? What biblical insights, or other scripture, can help them resolve their conflict?
18. Based on the biblical data, what modifications could be made to their approach in order to reach a mutually agreed solution?

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<sup>6</sup> Priolo, 130.