**Preventing & Resolving Conflict: The Biblical Path to Peace**

 As Christians, we are called by God to dwell together in unity (Eph. 4:3). This does not mean that we will always see everything eye to eye or that we will never offend one another. What it does mean is that true Christians can learn how to keep from entering into conflicts with one another. Even just one person can keep a conflict from happening (Proverbs 15:18).

 We can be encouraged because God’s Word is full of everyday, practical answers: 1) for preventing conflicts and 2) for resolving conflicts Biblically. In a world filled with strife and division, often finding its way into the Christian’s life, we can be a “peacemaker” and learn to handle conflict in a way that pleases God and benefits all those involved.

 As we begin this study, let’s commit ourselves to being the kind of people who seek to solve problems and not create them.

**I. Important Introductory Ideas**

 **A.** Exactly What is a Conflict?

 1. Literally it means, “to strike; fight against.”

 2. A General Definition: *Conflict is when two parties sin against one another (in communication and/ or their actions) and are then in opposition to one another.*

 **A conflict requires at least two people responding sinfully to one another?**

 **B.** What Does **God** Think of Conflict? *(look up verses and discuss)*

 1. It is grieves Him

 *Matthew 5:21-24*

 2. He wants His children to have no part in it

 *Ephesians 4:1-3*

 3. He wants His children to pursue peace

 *Romans 12:18; 14:19*

 4. He wants His children to avoid needlessly or sinfully offending others

 *1 Corinthians 10:31-32*

 5. He wants His children to love, pray for, and do good to those who sin against us. *Matthew 5:44-45; Romans 12:21*

 **D.** Where Do Conflicts Come From?

 1. From responding sinfully to **differences**

 *Different backgrounds: family, traditions, economics, etc.*

 *Different personal habits: likes, dislikes, perspectives*

 2. From responding sinfully to **offenses**

 “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” *Matthew 5:23-24*

3. From a failure to **love**  (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a)

 “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.” *Galatians 5:14-15*

 4. From **pride** and the **flesh!**

 *Galatians 5:19-21; James 4:1-3*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Prideful thoughts that lead to conflict:** | **Humble thoughts that avoid conflict:** |
| That's ridiculous!I want my own way!How dare she/he!I will not be treated this way! | She may have a point.I don't have to have my way.I need to pray for her/him.How can I return good to him/her? |

 **E.** Benefits of Differences and Disagreements

 1. They can encourage us to **search the Scriptures** (Ps.119:71-72).

 2. They can help us **think carefully** about how and what we think or what we believe (Prov. 15:28).

 3. They can help us **work harder** at communicating effectively (Eph. 4:25).

 4. They can produce **maturity** and **endurance** (James 1:2-5).

 5. They can **strengthen our faith** in the truth that God is working all things together for good (Rom. 8:28-29).

 6. They can give us opportunity to practice **servant-hood** and preferring one another (Phil. 2:2-3).

 7. They give us opportunity to **love and glorify** God (1 Cor. 10:31-32).

**II. Ungodly Responses to Conflict** (sinful ways we try to deal with conflict)

 **A. Avoidance!**

 1. By just keeping quiet

 Eph. 4:29-31

 2. By staying away from one another

 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”

 John 15:12

 “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another …” 1 Peter 4:8

 3. By changing the subject

 “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.” Prov. 12:22

 “… do not deceive with your lips.” Prov. 24:28

 4. By concealing information, sins, or bitterness

 “One who plans to do evil, men will call a schemer.” Prov. 24:8

 **B. Anger!**

 1. Responding with sinful anger

 Ephesians 4:26-27

 2. Attacking the person rather than the problem

 **Y-chart**

**III. A Biblical Response to Conflict**

 **A.** Some God-honouring Ways to **Avoid** Conflict

 1. Seek to know your spouse/ (other) well; appreciate him/her and understand his/her perspective

 “You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.” 1 Peter 3:7

 2. Gather plenty of information before speaking

 “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him.”
        “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him.” Proverbs 18:13, 17

 3. Pray, study, and think through an issue before speaking

 “The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.” Proverbs 15:28

 4. Demonstrate and communicate your love and care at the time of disagreement

 “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.” Ro. 12:9-10

 5. Listen more than you speak, but do speak

 “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” James 1:19

 6. In matters of sin, approach your spouse/ (child; other) in love

 “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ” Ephesians 4:15

 (\*\*\* you don’t have “THE RIGHT” to vent on others)

 7. In matters of preference, prefer the other person

 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour.” Romans 12:10

 8. In matters of wisdom and conscience, suggest searching the Scriptures and getting Biblical counsel

 “Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” Proverbs 11:14

 “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” 2 Tim. 2:15

 9. Refuse to sin in your communication

 “Listen, for I will speak noble things; and the opening of my lips will reveal right things. 7 For my mouth will utter truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8 All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing crooked or perverted in them.” Proverbs 8:6-8

 10. Be more interested in God’s glory and other’s good, than having your own way, or being “right”.

 “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31

 11. Give a gentle and caring answer to angry words

 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Prov.15:1

 **B.** Some **Sinful** Ways to Resolve Conflict

 1. Let time heal it (cf. Mt. 5:23-24; Eph. 4:26).

 2. Try to bury it.

 A wrong understanding of the biblical statement, “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8) - it doesn't mean, “love covers **up** a multitude of sins.” Love deals with sin in a biblical manner, then covers it and brings it up no more.

 3. Pretend it never happened (cf. Phil. 4:8a).

 4. Wait for the other person to initiate the resolution process (cf. Matt. 5:23-24).

 5. Punish the other person until they change and take all the blame (cf. Gal.6:1; Rom. 12:9-20).

 **C.** Some **Biblical** Ways to Resolve Conflict (aspects of repentance)

 1. Confess any sin that you are aware of to God (1 John 1:9-10)

 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts;
 and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” Ps 139:23-24

 2. Go to your spouse/ child / parent / sibling, and ask forgiveness for each offense and discuss a plan not to do those things again

 “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Eph. 4:32

 3. Desire to resolve conflicts fully, and quickly

 “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Ephesians 4:26b

 4. Pray together for God’s wisdom, self-control, and speech

 “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

 5. Each one should take a turn to confess any sin that has not been confessed (to God and other), and ask forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

 The four promises of forgiveness.

 1. I will not think about this incident.

 2. I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.

 3. I will not talk to others about this incident.

 4. I will not allow this incident to stand between us or to hinder our relationship

 6. Begin discussing the issues that precipitated the conflict.

 7. Decide what you can agree upon (each takes a turn).

 8. Decide what you do not agree upon (each takes a turn).

9. Decide on specific steps to resolve the issue (each offers input).

Search the Word … Seek godly (Biblical) counsel

 10. Together, begin carrying out the appropriate steps to resolve the issue.

 11. Decide if and when you need to discuss the issue again.

 12. Pray with and for each other and express love.

13. Remember the Cross!