

Is This Really Worth Fighting Over?

Introduction:

1. Conflicts generally involve two kinds of issues: material and personal.
 - Material issues involve substantive matters that must be resolved in order to settle a disagreement.
 - Should we build a new church building? Did Alice breach her contract? How much money does Ted owe Sue?
 - Personal issues are those things going on inside of a person, or between two people. They involve our attitudes, feelings, motives, words, behavior, and conduct towards each other.
2. Conflicts can involve both of these. Personal issues often have a strong influence on how we deal with the material ones.
 - **Example:** Luke 12:13-15
 - The material issue: How should the family inheritance be divided?
 - But, the primary personal issue was the brother's greed, which kept them from settling the material issue.
3. One of the first things to do when you are involved in a conflict is to define the personal and material issues, and discern how they relate to one another. Then you can begin to decide which steps you must take to resolve the problem.
4. It is wise to begin this process by asking yourself, "Is this really worth fighting over?"
5. When significant personal or material issues are involved, the answer to this question will be "yes." But, in many cases, if you look at the situation from a biblical perspective, the answer will be "no," which means you should settle the matter as quickly and quietly as possible.
6. The Bible **does** teach and indicate that, in many situations, the best way to resolve a conflict is simply to overlook the offences of others. Proverbs 19:11, 17:9, 14; 1 Peter 4:8; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
7. Since God does not deal harshly with us every time we sin, we should be willing to treat others in a similar fashion. This should take place under two conditions:
 - 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.
 - The offense should not be doing serious harm to God's reputation, to others, or to the offender.
8. But, many times, even when we should overlook an offense, it is a difficult thing to do.

In this lesson, we will explore three practical principles that will help us to overlook an offense when we decide that an issue is not worth fighting over.

First, check your own attitude.

1. It is always difficult to overlook an offense, especially if we are overly sensitive to the wrongs of others and tend to dwell excessively on what **they** have done. One way to guard against this problem is to check our attitudes in the light of God's Word.
2. There were two ladies at odds with one another in the church at Philippi. In Philippians 4:2-9, the apostle Paul focuses on the steps they must take to develop a proper attitude toward their situation and toward each other. These principles will help us if we are involved in a conflict.
3. Step # 1 is to rejoice in the Lord. vs. 4
 - Paul urges us to be God-centered in our approach to conflict.
 - A person may ask, "What is there to rejoice about when you are involved in a dispute?"
 - If Jesus is your Savior, your name is in the Book of Life (vs. 3)! No conflict should overshadow the joy of having received forgiveness through Christ. The more we rejoice in that forgiveness, the easier it will be to forgive others.
 - We can rejoice that God has given us the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the local church to guide, strengthen, and support us. As God works through these channels, we can receive reliable direction, grow in character, develop creative solutions, and see a return of genuine peace.
4. Step # 2 is to possess a gentle spirit. vs. 5
 - "*Moderation*" carries the idea of being gentle, large-hearted, courteous, considerate, and generous.
 - This is describing a quality which is the opposite of irritability, rudeness, and abrasiveness. It is describing a quality that would make a person nice instead of nasty.
 - Being gentle in the midst of a conflict produces several benefits, especially when it is "*known unto all men.*"
 - It reflects Christ's presence and power in your life, which pleases and honors God.
 - It guards you from speaking and acting harshly, which only makes matters worse.
 - It may encourage similar behavior in your opponent.
5. Step # 3 is to replace anxious thoughts with prayer. vs. 6-7
 - When we are in the midst of a conflict, we can easily get stressed out. It is easy to dwell on our difficult circumstances or on the wrong things that the other person has done or may do to us.
 - The best way to overcome this is to replace our worry and anxiety with prayer and thanksgiving. Thank Him for what He's already done, and request His assistance in dealing with our current challenges.
 - When we do this, something amazing happens (vs. 7). The hostility, anxiety, and inner conflict that we have been dealing with will begin to give way to a peace that can't be explained.

6. Step # 4 is to focus on the positive. vs. 8
 - When involved in conflict, most people tend to focus on the negative characteristics of the other person, exaggerating faults, and overlooking virtues.
 - The more distorted your perspective becomes, the more likely you are to imagine the worst about your opponent, which may lead you to misjudge completely his or her values, motives, and actions. A negative perspective also leads to bitterness as you dwell on your hurt, and think how undeserving of it you are.
 - To overcome this prejudicial tendency, you must think deliberately about aspects of your opponent that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and good.
 - As you regain a more balanced view of the other person, you will often find it easier to overlook minor offenses.
 - Even if a change in focus does not allow you to overlook every offense, it can help you in two other ways:
 - By realizing what is good in another person, you often will realize how much you will lose if your differences are not resolved.
 - The process of thinking right can be contagious. As you practice this principle toward your opponent, he or she may do the same towards you.
7. If you are presently involved in a conflict, ask yourself these questions:
 - What are the material issues in this conflict?
 - What are the personal issues in this conflict?
 - Which personal issues are having the greatest influence on you? How about your opponent?
 - What has the other person done that has offended you?
 - Check your attitude:
 - Why can you rejoice in the Lord in this situation?
 - Have you been irritable, rude, or abrasive in this situation? From this point on, where or how can you make a special effort to be forbearing, gentle, courteous, considerate, and kind? How could your gentleness be more evident to others?
 - What have you been worried or anxious about? How much have you prayed about this situation?
 - What is good about the person with whom you are in conflict? What is right about his or her concerns? Do you have any good memories of your relationship with him or her? How has God helped you through that person?
8. As we readjust our attitudes, God may show us that this issue is not worth fighting over.
9. Next week, we will examine two more practical principles that will help us to decide if an issue is worth fighting over.