

Taking the Next Step in Conflict Resolution

Introduction:

1. Paul knew that there would be quarrels within the body of Christ. Colossians 3:13
 - In any church, there will be conflicts, disputes, disagreements, annoyances, hurt feelings, differences of opinion, etc.
2. If we follow the peacemaking principles set forth in Scripture, we should be able to resolve most conflicts with our opponent in private.
3. When we approach others with a spirit of gentleness and humility and speak the truth in love, most people will respond in a positive way, and disputes can be resolved.
 - We learned several key principles from Scripture about how to communicate with others, especially when involved in a dispute. Proverbs 15:1
4. However, when peace is not restored and important issues are not resolved, it may be necessary to involve one or two other respected friends, church leaders, or other neutral individuals who can help to restore peace.
 - This person is a sort of mediator. Webster's defines this as, "One that mediates between parties at variance." Webster's listed several words as synonyms for this - intercessor, intermediary, go-between, middleman, peacemaker.
 - I like "mediator" because it is a biblical word and it reflects the work of Christ. He is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). It takes a Christ-filled person to take two people at odds, bring them together, and reconcile them.
 - You couldn't be more like Christ than when you are reconciling two people that are at odds.
5. This principle of a mediator is taught in Matthew 18:15-16 to Israel, but also in 1 Corinthians 6:1-5 to the body of Christ.
 - Let us make one thing clear – we are not discussing criminal issues such as physical abuse, rape, molestation, etc.
 - When someone is threatening us, breaking into our home, or abusing a member of our family, as believers we have every right to call the police and seek help and protection. Governmental authority is in place by God's design and God's will.
 - This text is dealing with civil disputes and personal issues between two believers.
6. In this lesson, we will explore biblical principles as to the appropriate way to involve others when seeking to resolve a conflict. Let's answer three questions:

First, how do you know when it is appropriate to involve others in helping you to resolve a conflict with another person?

1. Matthew 18:16 is very practical in answering this question. "*But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more...*"

2. The only reason to seek outside help is if the other person refuses to listen or work towards reconciliation. He has dug in his heels and refuses to do anything to work toward reconciliation.
3. You should make several attempts before involving others. If the other person refuses to listen, you may want to:
 - Vary your approach.
 - Check and see if you truly went to him in a spirit of meekness, or if you alienated him by the manner in which you approached him.
 - Make sure you were willing to listen to the other person.
4. Only when there is a total unwillingness to discuss the conflict, should you seek help from others.

Second, what is the proper way to ask others to become involved in helping you to resolve a conflict with someone?

1. Always try to do it by mutual agreement between you and your opponent.
 - You can suggest that the two of you ask one or more neutral persons to meet with you in an effort to facilitate more productive dialogue.
 - The neutral persons may be mutual friends, church leaders, fellow church members, or respected individuals in your community.
 - The main prerequisite is that they be spiritually mature Christians who are worthy of your respect and trust. 1 Corinthians 6:5; Galatians 6:1
 - If your opponent balks at your suggestion to involve others, carefully explain why doing so would be beneficial.
2. If you cannot do it by mutual agreement, you may need to involve others on your own initiative. Mutual agreement is always preferred, but it may not be possible if the other person won't agree.
 - Before you take this step, it is wise and often beneficial to warn your opponent of what you are about to do.
3. Whoever you choose as a mediator, make every effort not to give him any details about the conflict. Simply explain that you and the other person are at odds and need some help. Why is this so important?
 - It could bias him in your favor or encourage you to slander or gossip.
 - Only when you and the other person are both present should you give a detailed explanation of your perceptions to the mediator/counselor.
4. If your attempts to set up a meeting are unsuccessful, then the mediator should make every attempt to talk with or write to your opponent. You shouldn't give up until the other person adamantly refuses to listen. At that point you simply have to walk away and leave it with the Lord. You cannot force reconciliation.

Third, what should the mediator do to help resolve the conflict?

1. If your opponent does agree to a neutral mediator, what is the role of that mediator?
2. At first, he may simply facilitate communication by encouraging both sides to listen more carefully to each other.

3. He may also help to determine the facts by listening carefully himself, by asking appropriate questions, and by helping you and the other person obtain additional facts.
 - His primary role is to help you and the other person make the decisions needed to restore peace.
4. Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 6:1-6 both imply that mediators may also give advice on how to deal with the problem.
 - They may offer biblical solutions to material and personal issues, or simply give wise and practical advice. This is why the mediators must be spiritually mature in the faith.
 - They may encourage repentance and confession on either or both sides by pointing out any behavior that has been inconsistent with what is taught in the Bible.
 - They draw on their own knowledge and experience to propose practical solutions to specific problems.
5. If you and the other person mutually agree, you may ask these mediators to help resolve a deadlock. You both agree ahead of time to accept whatever solutions they suggest.

In Conclusion:

1. The name of this series is “How to Resolve Conflict and Live at Peace.”
2. Our God is the supreme peacemaker. Our God is a God of peace and reconciliation.
3. In Psalm 133:1 God states, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*”
4. If you find yourself in a dispute with another believer and you cannot seem to resolve it on your own, seek out a godly mediator. Your motive in this should not be to embarrass the other person, or prove to him that you’re right and he is wrong.
5. Your motive should be that you realize how much your God and Savior values peace and reconciliation, and you desire to please Him.