

The Teacher and a Biblical View of Conflict

“Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

“Conflict provides an opportunity to glorify God.”

Objectives:

At the end of this lesson the learner will ...

1. Understand the difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper.
2. Be able to quote from memory Matthew 5:9.
3. Understand that conflict is an opportunity to glorify God.
4. Understand the four main causes of conflict.
5. Understand the three main responses to conflict.

Introduction

Anyone like conflict? Most people I know do not enjoy conflict. It is something we avoid at all cost because of the negative images and emotions that often come to mind when we think of conflict. But is conflict really a bad thing?

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9, NKJV).

- ✓ A peace keeper is someone who goes into an area and is expected to keep the peace. Their job is to keep the environment peaceful. To keep the peace is good but Jesus did not say blessed are the peacekeepers. Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers.
- ✓ When Jesus spoke these words, I believe, He had specific situations in mind. Situations of conflict, confusion, and tension. All of these situations and more can happen in the classroom.
- ✓ A peacemaker is someone who can walk into a tense environment or situation and make peace. A peacemaker can restore a situation where peace has been broken.

Paul wrote, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26, NKJV). Anger is a God-given emotion that indicates someone or something has crossed our personal boundaries. As Bible school instructors, we will become angry at times and we should understand that

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this is not a bad thing. It is how we choose to embrace this emotion of anger that determines whether we will sin or glorify God. You see, conflict always provides an opportunity to glorify God.

“Every time you encounter a conflict, you will show what you really think of God” (Ken Sande, 2004, p. 33). So what is conflict?

DEFINING CONFLICT: Conflict can be defined as “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires” (Sande, 2004, p. 29).

- ✓ When you are not able to agree with someone else over a particular issue, problem or situation, conflict happens.

How we view conflict is important because it will determine how we handle conflict. “The Bible teaches that we should see conflict neither as an inconvenience nor as an occasion to force our will on others, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God in our lives” (Sande, 2004, p. 31).

Conflict Provides an Opportunity to Glorify God

When a student has a different opinion than you or when someone does not do what you want done do you become angry with them? If so, you need to ask yourself “why?”

- ✓ Why am I reacting this way?
- ✓ Is my anger justified? Or more importantly, “Am I expressing my anger in a way that is pleasing to God?” It is not enough to talk about God being love but as Bible school instructors, we must model God’s love so in everything we glorify God (Colossians 3:17).

When we have a biblical view of conflict we understand that conflict cannot be avoided. It is normal. Conflict is an opportunity to glorify God.

GROUP DISCUSSION (2-3 participants):

- ✓ The life of Jesus shows us how to please and honor God so we bring Him glory.
- ✓ Read the following verses and highlight the action or phrase in each verse that shows that the man Christ Jesus brought glory to God: John 5:30; 8:29; 17:4

When modelling God’s love and pleasing God becomes more important than pleasing our carnal lusts and holding onto worldly things then it becomes more natural to respond to conflict graciously, wisely, and with self-control. A biblical view of conflict demonstrates that we are not Christian in word only but we are Christ-like in action.

“Where [there is] no wood, the fire goes out; and where [there is] no talebearer, strife ceases” (Proverbs 26:20, NKJV). A biblical view of conflict reminds us that our focus is on bringing glory to God.

- ✓ It is not about getting in the last word with our students.
- ✓ It is not about being right.

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- ✓ It is not about winning the argument.
- ✓ Conflict is an opportunity to glorify God.

A great way to keep yourself focused on the Lord during conflict is to ask yourself two questions:

- 1) How can I please and honor God in this situation?
- 2) How can I bring God praise by showing He has saved me and is changing me?

Four Main Causes of Conflict

When you are facing serious challenges, seeking to please and honour God is the key to bringing him glory through your conflict. As a spiritual leader we need to know why conflict happens. Here are four main causes of conflict.

1) Misunderstandings due to poor communication.

- ✓ Joshua 22:10-34
- ✓ Before you come to a conclusion about why someone is doing something, take the time to listen for understanding. Do not be quick to judge the actions of an individual. Make sure there is clear communication.

2) Differences in values, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions.

“Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 15:39, NKJV).

- ✓ When you glorify God you will also see God’s glory in the conflict and the situation will strengthen you, making you a better person instead of weakening your testimony and making you and others feel bad.

In this verse Paul and Barnabas have had a serious conflict. The Bible calls it a sharp contention. Paul was not willing to bring John Mark with them because on their first missionary journey he had forsaken them and turned back (Acts 13:13). We do not know why Mark left but in Paul’s mind it was enough to refuse him on this second missionary journey. Because of the differences they had a serious conflict happened.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 teaches us that we are different, unique, and special. Yet we are all part of God’s body. Unity is the focus; even though we have differences and our differences will lead to conflict at times, we must remember that in all things we are to glorify God. We must understand that being a Christian is being “Christ-like” in our thoughts, words, and actions.

3) Competing for limited resources

Competition over limited resources, such as time, money, and resource material can be a frequent source of disputes in families, churches, businesses, and even Bible schools.

- ✓ Genesis 13:1-12.

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- ✓ A serious conflict was building between two family members. This conflict could have easily exploded into harsh words. It could have come to blows but it did not because Abram was confident in his God. Abram understood that conflict can only happen if he responded in a selfish, ungodly way.
- ✓ Lot was being selfish and greedy. Abram decided to be gracious and prefer his brother over himself.
- ✓ Notice, immediately after settling this conflict between Abram's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen God communicated with Abram and gave him a promised blessing all of us would love (Genesis 13:14-18).

As Bible school instructors and spiritual leaders, it is important to remain spiritual, otherwise the flesh will take over.

4) Many conflicts are caused by sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions.

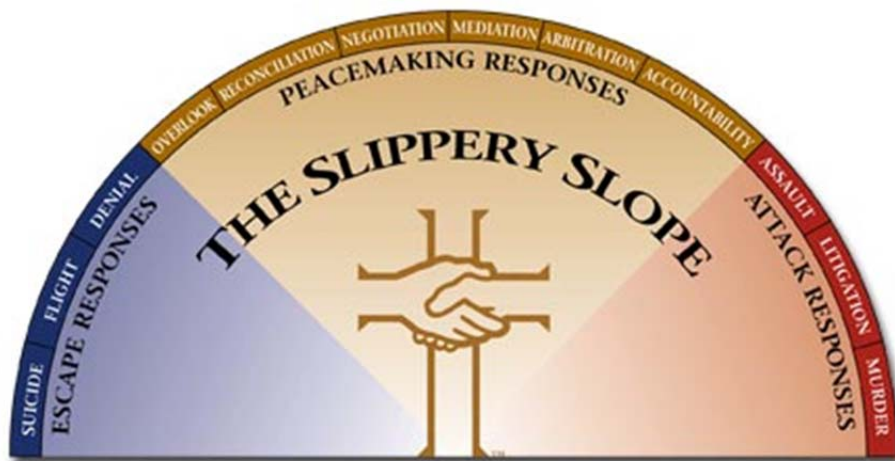
- ✓ James 4:1-2. "Many disputes begin or grow worse because one or both sides give in to their emotions and say or do things they later regret" (Sande, 2004, p. 33).
- ✓ How I speak to others during a conflict depends upon my current relationship with God and His Word.

GROUP DISCUSSION (2-3 participants): Take three minutes and decide which two, out of the four main causes of conflict, are seen the most in a Bible school setting. Explain why you chose those two main causes of conflict.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Take one minute and think deeply about this question: What is the difference between how you handle conflict and the way an unbeliever handles conflict?

Three Main Responses to Conflict

When it comes to conflict, there are three main responses: escape, attack, and peacemaking. Each response has several types of behavior and can be shown on this diagram referred to as the slippery slope.



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1) ESCAPE RESPONSES

Notice on the far left side of the slope is the “escape responses.”

- 1) Denial
- 2) Flight
- 3) Suicide

“People tend to use these responses when they are more interested in avoiding a conflict than in resolving it” (Sande, 2004, p. 23).

This approach is very common in churches and Bible schools. It can be seen both in students and instructors because many believe that all conflict is wrong or dangerous. Because many think Christians should always agree or fear that conflict will damage relationships, people will usually deny that there is a problem or run away from the problem. These types of responses are known as “peace-faking.”

Denial

One way to escape from a conflict is to pretend that it does not exist. We think, this is not really a problem. When we do this then we refuse to resolve the conflict properly.

Although this may solve the issue for a little while it usually makes things worse (Genesis 16:1-6; 1 Samuel 2:22-25).

Flight

Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away. This may involve leaving the house, ending a relationship, quitting a job, changing churches, or to stop teaching at the Bible school.

Flight is usually a harmful way to deal with a conflict because most of the time it only postpones a proper solution to the problem (Genesis 16:6-8).

There are times when flight is appropriate. For example when you are in a very emotional conflict or confusing situation it is best to withdraw to calm down, organize your thoughts, and pray. The important thing is to make sure that “flight” is not your pattern of dealing with conflict. If it is it will not solve the situation.

Suicide

Suicide is what people do when they lose all hope that their situation will change. They become desperate and make the wrong decision to seek a permanent solution (death) to a temporary problem (conflict). “Suicide is never the right way to deal with conflict” (Sande, 2004, p. 24).

2) ATTACK RESPONSES

When we go to the right side of this slope we come to the “attack responses.”

- 1) Assault
- 2) Litigation

3) Murder

Notice the extreme opposites on both sides of the slippery slope end the same - in death. Extreme, uncontrolled responses to conflict are deadly.

Attack “responses are used by people who are more interested in winning a conflict than in preserving a relationship” (Sande, 2004, p. 24). These responses are known as peace breaking.

There are basically two types of people who use attack responses:

- 1) People who have aggressive personalities and are self-confident.
- 2) People who feel trapped, fearful, and taken advantage of by others.

Whatever the reason may be, this approach uses aggression as a way to pressure people into doing what they want and in the mind of the attacker removes or solves the conflict.

Assault

In order to win the conflict and overcome the opponent, some people use different types of force or intimidation such as verbal attacks (gossip and slander), physical violence or trying to hurt a person financially or professionally (Acts 6:8-15). Any of these actions will only make the conflict worse.

Litigation

Another way to force people to do what we want is to take them to court. Although some conflicts may legitimately be taken to a civil judge (Acts 24:1-26:32; Romans 13:1-5), lawsuits usually damage relationships and often fail to achieve complete justice (Sande, 2004, p. 24).

When one Christian takes another to court, their witness can be seriously damaged. That is why Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 to settle our differences within the church. Whenever possible, we need to settle our conflicts outside of court (Matthew 5:25-26).

Murder

When conflict gets out of control people may become so desperate to win that they try to kill those who oppose them (Acts 7:54-58).

As Christians, most would never think of killing someone, we should remember that in God’s eyes, we are guilty of murder when we hold onto anger or contempt in our hearts towards someone else (1 John 3:15; Matthew 5:21-22). Regardless of the type of conflict, it is an opportunity to glorify God. This is done by having a biblical view of conflict and choosing peacemaking responses.

3) PEACEMAKING RESPONSES

Peacemaking and resolving conflict is something God expects from His children, especially spiritual leaders and teachers. I confess this is not always easy but it is worth pursuing. These six responses are commanded by God and there is a natural progression from one to the other.

Notice that the first three peacemaking responses are referred to as “personal peacemaking.” They can be done privately between you and the other person involved in the conflict. Most conflicts can be resolved through one of these three responses.

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(1) Overlook an Offense

Many disputes or disagreements are really not all that serious. So they should be quietly and deliberately overlooked (Proverbs 19:11; 12:16; 17:14; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 4:8).

“Overlooking an offense is a form of forgiveness and involves a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger” (Sande, 2004, p. 25).

(2) Reconciliation

If an offence is too serious to overlook or has damaged the relationship, we need to resolve personal or relational issues through confession, loving correction, and forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24; Proverbs 28:13; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 18:15).

(3) Negotiation

Even if we successfully resolve relational issues, we may still need to work through material issues related to money, property or other rights. This will require open, honest discussion where the two people negotiate until a suitable solution is reached and agreed upon by both sides (Philippians 2:4).

When a conflict cannot be solved by one of these three “personal peacemaking” responses, God then calls us to use one of the next three peacemaking responses known as “assisted peacemaking.” These three responses require the involvement of other people from our church or Christian community.

(4) Mediation

If two people cannot reach an agreement in private, they should ask one or more objective outside people to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions (Matthew 18:16).

“These mediators may ask questions and give advice, but they have no authority to force you to accept a particular solution” (Sande, 2004, p. 26).

(5) Arbitration

When you and an opponent cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a material issue, you may appoint one or more arbitrators to listen to your arguments and give a binding decision to settle the issue. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Paul shows us that this is how Christians should resolve even their legal conflicts with one another.

(6) Accountability

If a professing Christian refuses to be reconciled and do what is right, Jesus commands church leaders to formally hold him or her accountable to Scripture and promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness.

“And if he refuses to hear them, tell [it] to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17, NKJV).

Direct church involvement is often looked at negatively among Christians today, but when it is done lovingly and in a way to restore relationships, it can save relationships and bring about justice and peace.

Conclusion

Our goal is to practice the three “personal peacemaking” responses. This is most pleasing to Christ. However, as we move from the left side to the right on the slippery slope, our responses move from being private to being public. When we are not able to resolve conflict privately, then more people become involved in order to settle the dispute.

As Bible school instructors, our goal must always be to glorify God in the middle of every conflict so in the end, we do not bring a reproach upon the name of Christ nor ruin our testimony as a Christ follower. Conflict provides an opportunity to glorify God.

Reference

Sande, K. (2004). *The peacemaker: A biblical guide to resolving personal conflict (3rd ed.)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Lesson in Review

1. What does conflict provide? _____

2. Write out Matthew 5:9. _____

3. What is the difference between a peacekeeper and a peacemaker? _____

4. Define conflict. _____

5. List the four main causes of conflict. _____

6. List the three main response categories to conflict. _____

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7. Which response category is most pleasing to God and why? _____

8. As Bible school instructors, our goal is to practice what type of peacemaking response? _____
