

CONFLICT RESOLUTION in Relationships **James DeFrancisco, PhD**

Blessed [are] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
– Matthew 5:9

Human relationships can be very difficult. This is obvious in international politics and diplomacy which is universally vicious and self centered. In an effort toward self-serving initiatives governments strictly complies with their plans for carrying out policy dictates. The following is a list of what politicians, diplomats and military are trained to do, along side how Jesus teaches us regarding our behavior:

Worldly Approach:	Jesus' Teachings:
Pride	Humility
Get our way	Obey God's commands and follow His way
Cover up our mistakes	Confess mistakes and release them
Elevate ourselves	Seek to elevate others
Retaliate	Forgive
Hate our enemies	Love our enemies
When attacked return more force	Pursue peace
When cursed, retaliate	Pray and show mercy for those who curse you
Emphasize only facts/data	Vision and faith
Exploit people	Serve people
Strive to get as much as possible	Give and share as much as possible
Friendship and love are conditional	Cultivate friendship and unconditional love
Depend on one's own strength	Allow God to perfect our strength in weakness
Respect status	Do not value one person over another
Strive to lead and control	Submit as a servant
Be independent	Be intra-dependent and one with God and others

What military general would consider "turning the other cheek" when struck by another or "blessing" their enemies, or telling their troops when persecuted, or even taken away by force, to pray for them?

How many human and civil rights activists, when being confronted with injustice by those in civil authority choose nonresistance? Contrast human nature which dictates arguing and wrestling with an arresting officer, compared to Jesus' teaching to surrender and turn the other cheek. How would community leaders be perceived if they loved those who do not love them and actually delivered more than expected? That's exactly what Jesus instructed us to do! His teachings are totally contrary to current values and common practice.

Conflicts in the family, workplace, church, or anywhere, superficially may appear to be between two people or two parties but in reality the conflict exists within the individual. At any level, even a group level, the conflict continues to exist within

individuals that have polluted and continue to pollute a group identity. Anger, anxiety, mental illness, and other factors relating to conflict that are affecting business and other areas of life. As we address the internal source of the conflict with the individual and transform the individual perspective, conflict may be resolved and the process will transform, not only the individual, but the community around the individual as well.

Much of conflict resolution training and literature assumes that the persons involved want to resolve the conflict and that positive thinking, conflict resolution techniques, and communication skills are all that is needed. Although win/win approaches, active listening, negotiation techniques, conflict mapping, mediation, assertiveness training, and related approaches are helpful, alone they are often not enough to resolve deep rooted conflicts.

In a previous article (ACTS, *From Conflict to Unity*), I mentioned that the purpose of the creation of human beings is companionship and that the Bible is a story of human relationships. I also mentioned that at the root of most (if not all) conflicts is selfishness and that Jesus described the steps to resolving conflict in the Beatitudes and the entire Sermon on the Mount. The Two Great Commandments are the important foundation in resolving conflict and achieving unity. General steps are 1) Obedience to God's law; 2) Submission to God and one another; 3) A desire for oneness with God and His people.

In that article we looked at the concept of a house built on a solid foundation with seven pillars to illustrate how we can overcome conflict and achieve unity. The seven pillars presented were:

1st Pillar: Power Over Conflict - The first step to both wisdom and harmony is to overcome ego. Humility is essential in human relationships

2nd Pillar: The Power of commitment - The Holy Scriptures present covenants and commitments in relationships.

3rd Pillar: The Power of Submission - A key that can help in this area is responding instead of reacting. Each party in a relationship must learn to respond to issues with patience, love, and thought rather than quickly reacting emotionally

4th Pillar: The Power of Unity - The power of unity is the power of one. The walls of division and competition are preventing many from experiencing the love, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit. Competition and pride breed division.

5th Pillar: Power of Communication - Improving communication involves "judicious editing" of conversation and communication styles is helpful in developing a stronger bond.

6th Pillar: Power of Love - Unconditional love is enhanced through promoting *value* by communicating the person as a person of great value, resolving conflicts without putting the other down, and respecting the other person.

7th Pillar: Power of Forgiveness - We can choose beyond Fight or Flight when dealing with conflict. We can choose to Flow in forgiveness rather than suffer in bitterness. Beware of the root of bitterness.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. - Hebrews 12:15

Whether relationships are in business, marriage, or friendships, the enemy of our souls has a very specific strategy to destroy relationships. A conflict arises, judgments are made, and feelings are hurt. What happens next is the defining point of whether the enemy gains a foothold, or the grace of God covers the wrong.

When a root of bitterness is allowed to be planted and grown, it is like a cancer, affecting that person and also affecting all others who are involved.

Breaking satan's foothold requires at least one person to move into God's grace. It won't happen when either party "feels" like it, for none of us will ever feel like forgiving. None of us feel like talking when we have been hurt. Our reaction is to withdraw or lash out at the offending party. It is only obedience and true love in our heart that allows God's grace to cover the wrongs incurred. This grace prevents the parties from becoming victims who will seek justice for their pain.

The next time you are hurt by someone, realize the significance of the crossroads where you find yourself. Choose grace instead of bitterness, life instead of death and destruction. Then you will be free to move past the hurt, and a root of bitterness will not be given opportunity to grow. Be aware of your own emotional reactions

Although conflict seems unavoidable in our relationships, it can be overcome. When we hate and resent our enemies, bitterness is born within ourselves. To promote peace we must begin by looking within and changing ourselves to conform to God's will before we attempt to change others. This is the essence of praying and acting out God's will in our relationships.

When we pray, consider our own sins first. Ask God in humility; incline the ear of our hearts toward Him, surrender yourself as a living sacrificial witness for His will. Pray for those in conflict with you in the same way that you would pray for anyone in need – whether that need be for peace, salvation, understanding, or anything. Seek God's wisdom and the desire of His heart. Develop under Him as His disciple. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Identify, destroy, and eliminate all religious pride and self-righteousness. Overcome fear. Speak the truth in humility and love. Live out your faith in authenticity. When you pray for an enemy ask God if He loves them. When He responds, "Yes, of course," ask Him how much He loves them. You will find the answer in the familiar words of John 3:16 and the outstretched arms of a crucified Savior.

FINALLY... When we are in a conflict, is it possible that we can learn something from those who do not agree with us? Are we open to discussion? Do we respect their position? Could we listen and then present our view without trying to convert them, persuade them, control them, or condemn them? We must consider all of this and more as we humbly listen and speak the truth in love.

SUMMARY

When you pray for conflict resolution, consider your own sins. Ask God in faithfulness and humility, incline the ear of your heart toward Him in prayer, surrender yourself toward Him, and make yourself a living sacrificial witness for His will. Seek His wisdom and the desire of His heart. Use good judgment. Develop under Him as His disciple. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Identify, destroy, and eliminate all pride and self-righteousness. Overcome fear. Speak the truth in humility and love. Live out your faith in authenticity. Pray, listen, learn, and go forward to forgive and resolve conflict in the name of the true Lord and Savior, the King of the Universe. His anointing empowers every one of his true disciples.

To resolve conflict takes much wisdom and discipline. It also involves control of speech. It requires dealing directly with individuals rather than going around them or gossiping about them. It is effective to seek peace and win-win objectives in our relationships. If you truly do everything you can and the conflict continues, rest assured that what you have done is sufficient to satisfy God's expectations. Not everyone will respond to your attempts at peacemaking.

Conflict Resolution resources and training are based on techniques and skills which may be relevant to solving any conflict. Pick and choose the skill - or skills - appropriate to your particular issue or crisis. Above all, pray, repent, forgive, and humbly approach the situation with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Conflict resolution works best with the compassion and mind of Christ.

About the author . . .

Jim DeFrancisco has been serving as President of Miltha Ministries and Institute of Christian Principles since 1992. He has written many articles and studies on Scriptural topics. He has a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies (University of Biblical Studies), and a Doctor of Ministry degree in Christian Counseling (American Christian College and Seminary). He is on faculty as a professor at Maranatha College and has courses on the Gospel of John and Christian College for Church of God (7th Day) seminary students. He lives in Mishawaka, Indiana with his wife, Sandy. Together they have 3 sons and 6 grandchildren. He has been a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day) for over 25 years. His teachings are non-denominational and non-sectarian and based on Holy Scripture.