

Biblical perspectives on conflict management and peacemaking essay



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OUTLINE I. Introduction II. Basic Conflict Concepts III. Peacemaking IV. The Author's Life Lessons BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND PEACEMAKING Introduction As descendants of Adam and Eve, one has a few realities to grapple with.

This reality is based in the fact that one has a sin nature. Sin is present and influences everyday life. The world is evil, life is hard and conflict happens because sin is a reality of this world. One does not accept the world just as it is but makes an effort to reform it.

Life is difficult but one seeks means by which to lighten the load along the broken road of life. One is motivated to exert resources toward improving the world and the living of life because he knows that the outcome is rewarding. Everyday people recycle and reuse to stop the horrors of global warming in an effort to improve the world. One is likely to work hard to keep physically fit in order to improve his quality of life.

But why is it that only Miss America and anti-war campaigns scream for peace? Why does not every person strive and seek after peace? Why is one more likely to support Al Gore or spend hundreds of dollars each year sculpting firm abs than to spend a few hours dealing with conflict? The emphasis on the physical seems especially illogical when both the material world and one's body will pass away. Peacemakers will be called ' sons of God' and live eternally (Matt 5: 19). Will anyone remember the athletic, healthy supporters of the Green movement to save the world from global warming in eternity? This is yet to be seen. But one can know for sure that peacemaking through conflict has eternal benefits.

Basic Concepts of Conflict The Cause of Conflict Scripture—quite literally from beginning to end—teaches that sin is the root cause of all conflict. The first book of the Bible describes a scene of conflict that has far ranging effects. Satan was in conflict with God his creator (Isa 14: 12). Satan valued self proclamation and pride over God's authority resulting in his demotion from Heaven. His retaliation was then upon the most cherished of God's creation—man. Eve experienced conflict between what she understood to be true and the doubt that the serpent threw into her mind (Gen 1: 6).

The entrance of sin into the world resulted in immediate conflict between God and man. Man had conflict within because though he desired intimacy with God, he feared his vulnerability and nakedness (Gen 1: 10). Man left the garden with many curses upon his head—most of which were relational (Gen 1: 24). Women would be ruled by men. Man would fight to survive. God and man would not have perfect union.

The fall of man was just the beginning of conflict internal and external. The evidences of conflict within and without are in everyday life. Internal and relational conflict is the result of sin which will continue to plague man until the final redemption of the world as described in the book of Revelation. Bleak as this may seem, God is a God of redemption.

Through the provision of his son Jesus Christ, vertical redemption between God and man is possible. Christ's sacrifice also provides for redemption of horizontal relationships—man-to-man. It is only through the application of the Gospel that conflict can truly be resolved. It is only through the sacrifice of one's interests for the sake of others that conflict can be redeemed and

used for the edification of man and the glory of God. Managing conflict for the glory of God and the preservation of relationships is no easy task. Conflict involves many factors, levels and influences.

Each person benefits from understanding the complexity of conflict and recognizing his or her responsibility in conflict. This involves the correct attitude, focus and resources. Above all else it requires the humility to serve one another. Types of Conflict Management Each situation requires different responses from the parties involved to work toward resolution. No two conflicts are the same.

However, those in leadership are often most involved with conflict since they hold the most amount of influence. Therefore, it behooves leaders to assess the types of conflict management so that, as the situation requires the leader can adapt the approaches for the most positive outcome for all involved. In his book, *Creative Conflict Management*, Donald Palmer identifies five main conflict management styles. Each of these styles has certain pros and cons as well as appropriate times for use.

These five styles are: avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, compromising and attacking. (Donald Palmer, *Creative Conflict Management*, 25-31)

Avoiding This style involves simply staying out of conflict. It requires very little investment toward relationships, passivity and unassertiveness on the part of the avoider. The avoider will run, hide or simply withdraw to alleviate any pain that may potentially be accrued.

The outcome is often that conflict goes unresolved and bitterness may occur.

However, this may be an appropriate response when others in conflict are
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too immature to respond well, when conflict cannot possibly result in positive outcomes or as a stalling tactic to allow time needed to settle emotions thus bringing clarity. Accommodating This style is implemented when an individual's focus is to maintain relationships—even at unhealthy costs. The style often necessitates sacrificing the interest of the accommodator to appease the interests of others.

This style often results in the accommodator endangering his own health for the sake of others which in the long run, helps no one. However, this style may be employed when there are several ideas that are good but one must be chosen or when one feels that he is unsure of his own ideas about a situation. Collaborating This style is distinctively middle of the road. It involves working together to help everyone in the situation. Unlike accommodating, this style does not require that one give up all of his interests to help others.

It is a balance between assertiveness and flexibility. This is the preferred style for most conflicts. Compromising This style includes incorporating the interests of two opposing parties, facilitating a fair amount of some of the interests of each party and agreeing to meet halfway. It often involves bargaining and negotiation.

This style often provides a good solution that opposing parties can agree to but may not result in the best solution for everyone involved. This style may be appropriate when opposing parties are equally stubborn, the goals of each party are equally valid or when there is an element of urgency in reaching a decision. Competing This style is often one sided with one party getting their

own way. The competitor may use any tactic—whether subtle manipulation or overt power plays—to come out on top in a conflict.

This style can often isolate the competitor from those who could be helpful in finding the best solution. This style may be appropriate in extreme cases when immediate action is needed. Working toward peace in a conflict may involve some or all of the styles of management depending on the complexity of the situation. These styles are to be used with discernment and always with the goal of peace.

The goal should not be to please others but to serve them. Some situations call a leader to serve by making the unpopular choice that is absolutely necessary or other times a leader must set aside a conflict until all parties are able to calm down. But in all things, leaders are to be peacemakers.

Peacemakers All believers are called to be peacemakers. Whatever type of conflict management is used, these tools are to be wielded with the intent to make peace.

Even the ministry of Christ reflects the dynamics of peacemaking.

Peacemaking is not an easy skill to develop and requires much versatility and flexibility on the part of the peacemaker. In his book *The Peacemaker*, Sande identifies five Biblical themes that reflect peace. (Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 37) 1. Peace is part of God's character.

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. " (2 Cor 13: 11). 1 2. Peace is one of the great blessings that God gives

to those who follow him: " And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. " (Gal 6: 16).

3. God repeatedly commands his people to seek and pursue peace. " So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom 14: 19). 4.

God describes his covenant in terms of peace " For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isa 54: 10). 5. God taught his people to use the word peace as a standard form of greeting or salutation. " Then Eli answered, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him. " (1 Sam 1: 17) In Romans 12: 18, we are commanded, " As far as it depend on you, live at peace with everyone. God desires peace and expects it from his people.

He expects it because he offers peace to his children. Sande notes three dimensions of the peace provided through Jesus Christ: " peace with God, peace with one another and peace within ourselves. "(Peacemaker, 38-39) These dimensions are mutually inclusive working together in harmony. Peace with God will result in peace with others. Peace with others is not possible if one does not have peace within. Peace with God Peace with God is only possible through Christ.

Chapter one of Colossians speaks of the deity of Christ and specifically it states, " For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven,

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making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him," (Col 1: 19-23). Peace with Others The sacrifice of Christ does not ensure the absence of conflict in relationships. It is the basis and empowering force that makes peace in relationships a reality.

God commands us to do what we can to live at peace with everyone. This unity even in the midst of conflict between believers can be a strong witness for Christ. Peace within Oneself The act of trusting Christ for salvation is the first step in a journey of complete dependence on him for all things. Isaiah understood the benefit of trust.

" You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast and because he trusts you" (Isa 26: 3). This concept is best pictured through prayer. One prays because he recognizes that he alone cannot carry out the will of God. He recognizes that Christ's sacrifice allows him to come directly to God giving God control of that which man cannot do. There is much peace in relying on God.

Just as it says in Philippians, " Do not worry for anything but in everything by prayer and petition present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4: 6-7). This verse presents both a condition and a promise —trust God and have inner peace. Unrighteous Anger—An Obstacle to Peacemaking Anger has so many faces. Anger is expressed overtly through unkind words, hurtful actions or even physical abuse.

Anger can be expressed covertly in thoughts, manipulations or sly comments. Unrighteous anger can be an obstacle to peacemaking that all believers should be aware of. It is especially important for those in leadership to check their own emotions as well as know how to react to the emotions of others. Conflict gives opportunity for the venting of emotions.

One should be aware that anger being misused can often complicate and compound anger causing sin to fester. However, anger—when controlled and righteous—can have unseen benefits. The feelings of anger can be caused by a perceived or actual crossing of boundaries, sin nature warring within each man or the indignation regarding the sins of others. It is important to note that whatever the cause of anger, sin is not justified by anger (Eph 4: 26). Anger (the emotion and not the physical manifestation of it) can be a positive motivator in some cases. It is the righteous anger of God that caused Christ to confront the money changers in the temple (Matt 21: 12).

It is the anger of God toward sin that can enable one to confront a brother in sin. Caution should be taken when dealing with anger. When dealing with the anger of another, it is important to realize that one person cannot control another. One can respond to another and anger should be responded to with grace and prudence (Prov 15: 1; Col 4: 6). Godly anger is possible because God himself is angered (Exo 32: 1-20). The following Biblical cautions should be used in utilizing godly anger (Bob Deffinbaugh, http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=497, 12/17/07):

1. Godly anger is an expression of the anger which God has toward the ungodly actions of men.

This is contrasted by the anger of man which arises when man thinks more highly of himself than he ought to. " For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1: 20). 2. Godly anger is not explosive, but is only slowly provoked. " Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ' The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth'" (Exodus 34: 6). 3.

God does not take pleasure in expressing His anger in the judgment of men. " The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3: 9). 4. Godly anger is always under control not excessive or abusive. " But he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; And often he restrained his anger, And did not arouse all his wrath" (Psalm 78: 38). This Author's Life Lessons This author learned many lessons both in class and out of class during this course.

The class material provided relevant tools and Scriptural foundations for dealing with conflict. This author has had multiple opportunities to apply the concepts given at work, church and friendships. She was particularly convicted by the Holy Spirit through God's Word that peace is not something that merely happens. Scripture seems to couple striving and struggle with peace. She also knows that it is worth the striving and struggling because peace within, peace with God and peace with others all go hand in hand. This author now realizes that she cannot have one with out the others.

This author also foresees pending conflict building between family members during the holiday season. An aunt of this author recently chose to pursue a

lifestyle in homosexuality. Her mother is religious (though unsaved) and is disgusted by the lifestyle of said aunt. Ironically, even during the composition of this paper, this author was fielding questions from her mother regarding advice on how to handle the situation.

The mother feels that she simply cannot deal with the aunt's sin and disregard for Christian morals. The mother caused conflict at a previous family holiday celebration and this author has an opportunity to be a witness for Christ by striving for peace this holiday season. This author is reminded of what this holiday season is truly about. It is about the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace who came to give peace on earth. If it were not for the peace brought through the fullness of God in helpless babe, this author knows that her relationship with God and others would be treacherous.

This author is thankful for God's unspeakable gift.