

(MANAGE)

THE CHRISTIAN WAY TO HANDLE CONFLICT

Matt. 18:15-22 (RSV)

INTRODUCTION: How wonderful it would be if we lived in a world of peace and tranquility.

But we don't. Wherever we turn there is conflict:

1. In the family
2. In marriage
3. At school
4. At work
5. In the ~~army~~ church
6. With people around us.

What can we do?

and this conflict in particular.

First, we need to understand conflict in general.

A. Poor communication - crossed transactions arise when the ego state addressed does not respond to the ego state initiating the address.

2. Discrepancy between expectations, feelings, behavior, hopes, or needs of various persons.

I. Some people, disregarding the Christian Gospel, handle conflict by:

A. Taking flight.

They run away from it:

B. Making a fight out of it. Negative approaches

1. Cold war - Denying the presence of the conflict and refusing to relate with one another.

"I'm not angry, I just don't want to talk to you anymore."

"I'm not mad, I'm just going to go outside for a while. Leave me alone."

---retreating into the television

---hiding behind the newspaper.

2. Sniper wars--When one harbors hostility or conceals conflict until the other person is exposed publicly. Then publicly the sniper brings up the conflict with semi-humorous sarcasm, and humiliates the victim while hiding behind the protection of others.

3. Propaganda warfare - when someone begins to spread unfavorable information publicly or privately concerning someone else. An attempt to discredit the integrity of another. ---Name calling, mud slinging, Bringing up events from the past.

4. Torture war - when pain is intentionally inflicted upon someone in conflict. ---child abuse, wife beating, emotional and mental cruelty

5. Atomic war - occurs when "the big bomb is dropped" on someone in order to relieve the tension from conflict.

---When one threatens or actually implements unacceptable behavior in order to escape conflict.

---An example would be teenagers threatening to run away from home, (or soldiers threatening to go AWOL) or commit suicide, or husbands threatening to withhold economic support from the family, or WORKERS who threaten to get their superiors into trouble by poor performance on inspections or testing, or by accusations of gross misbehavior, and "ruin their career."

But remember, you cannot drop an atomic bomb in a close family or unit, and run fast enough to escape the fallout.

These are examples of mismanagement of conflict. Surely there are better alternatives.

Christ shows us a better, constructive way. It is recorded in Matthew 18:15-22.

III. WHAT IS THE CHRISTIAN WAY TO MANAGE CONFLICT? Our scripture gives us seven guidelines:

A. Go as a brother or sister in Christ. Be sure you know what it means to be in the family of God and be "in Christ". Be sensitive, and listen.

Keep a proper attitude

B. Make it your own open agenda.

Send an "I message."

The offended party is to take the initiative for reconciliation.

This^{is} what GOD did.

Identify the conflict specifically.

Focus on its CAUSE.

C. Stay with one agenda at the time.

Discussing the conflict is even more important than WORSHIP if it is a barrier between two Christians. (Mt. 5:23-24)

It isn't easy to stay with the one subject of the conflict. It produces anxiety, and there is strong pressure to change the subject.

D. Focus on the agenda AND FORGIVE THE PERSON.

This could lead through several stages:

1. Define the agenda, specifically.

Wife: "I am having difficulty in finding time for the household chores now that we both are working full time."

2. Look for as many alternatives as possible.

3. After all possible alternatives have been generated, NEGOTIATION begins in order to find the most acceptable alternative.

--must be in good faith.

---in the spirit of Christian love

4. Implement that alternative for a mutually agreed upon amount of time.

5. Don't forget to "forgive the person."

The central motif throughout the NT is forgiveness^{ness}.

Forgiveness is often confused with PLACATING.

Family members who permit themselves to be

doormats are not expressing forgiveness.

The placater feels worthless and helpless.

He is a "yes man", always trying to please, always "bootlicking", always trying to get someone to approve of him, owing everybody gratitude, and always responsible for everything that

goes wrong. THIS IS NOT WHAT THE BIBLE MEANS ABOUT FORGIVENESS. Forgiveness can come only after ascertaining responsibility for the conflict. And the popular expression "To forgive is to forget" simply is not true. In some major conflicts forgetting may not be possible.

But remembering need not be painful if there is real Christian forgiveness and reconciliation.

E. When the previous four steps have been taken and are unsuccessful, then "seek a peacemaker." --someone who is wise, sensitive, and committed to all parties. This might be a pastoral counselor, or a trained counselor in the fields of social work or psychiatry, education, or guidance. Then you should go through the first four steps or guidelines in the presence of the peacemaker.

F. In this fails, consider making the conflict a matter of more public concern of a larger caring community.

"Seek several peacemakers."

"Take it before the church."

Go through the first four steps or guidelines in the presence of this larger caring community or sharing group.

G. If all else fails, consider disassociating yourselves. (Begin anew) If you sincerely go through these steps and follow these guidelines you will very seldom have to resort to this drastic action. But you might have to do it in from 1% to 5% of the serious conflicts.

In the family this could mean for the children to go to live with relatives or to be placed in foster homes, or, if old enough, to move out on their own.

It could mean a private vacation, a trial separation, or even divorce for the spouses.

In the army it could mean a change of units or of assignments, and in civilian work it could mean a change of vocations.

It could mean lots of things.

But the point is that it isn't the first or early solution to your problems.

There are probably lots of other good solutions to the conflict if you will only open your eyes and see them and try them.

Church fellowship
Any social system is strengthened when conflict is successfully resolved.

WAC Chapel, June 1978; 14th Army Band Aug 78
Norwood - 10/24/92