

A Biblical View of Conflict and Its Resolution

Week 8

Some murderous conflict may well come to pass

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<http://www.calvaryrpc.org/SundaySchool/>
<http://www.logicteacher.com/conflict/>

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the updated New American Standard Bible.

Some material is based on *The Peace Maker*, by Ken Sande.

Class Goals

- To understand what the Bible says (both explicitly and by implication) about conflict
- To learn how to distinguish between necessary and unnecessary conflict
- To learn practical, biblically-acceptable methods for resolving conflict

Your Assignment was ...

- Homework —

(1) Think about whether the words that you use during conflicts tend to escalate the conflicts;

(2) Evaluate your propensity for adjective/adverb use.

The Class So Far ...

- Week 1: Introduction & Overview
- Week 2: Internal conflict
- Week 3: Reasons for conflict
- Week 4: Conflicts in history (led by Sam)
- Week 5: Conflict as opportunity
- Week 6: Response to conflict: Escape
- Week 7: Response to conflict: Escalate 1
 - ▶ Verbal Escalation
 - Direct: put downs, yelling, obscenities
 - Indirect: gossip, slander
 - ▶ Suggestions for ways to avoid it

Responses to Conflict

- Three main categories of responses:
 - ▶ Attempting to **escape** the conflict 1/8
 - ▶ Attempting to **escalate** the conflict 1/15, now
 - ▶ Attempting to **resolve** the conflict Jan 29, Feb

- Ken Sande refers to these as
 - ▶ Peace·faking
 - ▶ Peace·breaking
 - ▶ Peace·making

Escalating

- Verbal Escalation
 - ▶ Direct: put downs, yelling, obscenities
 - ▶ Indirect: gossip, slander
- Extra-Verbal Escalation
 - ▶ Physical: slapping, hitting, fighting, murder
 - ▶ Getting others onto your side
 - ▶ Litigation

Sande calls these **attack responses**, and has three types: assault, litigation, and murder

Follow-up from Last Week

- Ideas for avoiding verbal escalation
 - ▶ When you speak
 - Do not just *assume* you have been understood; be sure that you have
 - Avoid unnecessarily offensive words
 - Minimize your use of adjectives and adverbs
 - ▶ When you listen
 - Do not presume that all words are being used in the same way that you use them; seek clarification
 - Try to overlook offensive words; alternatively, address them immediately
 - Concentrate on the nouns and verbs being spoken
- What about tone & body language?

Tone & Body Language

- May be as important as the actual words
 - ▶ Some (but not all) people are more likely to react to your tone and body language than to the words you say
- When speaking
 - ▶ Be careful of both tone and body language
 - ▶ But, do not rely on either to convey your message
- When listening
 - ▶ Try not take offense at either
 - ▶ If you are offended, discuss it immediately with the person who is talking

Escalating

- Verbal Escalation

- ▶ Direct: put downs, yelling, obscenities
- ▶ Indirect: gossip, slander

- Extra-Verbal Escalation

- ▶ Physical: slapping, hitting, fighting, murder
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Physical Escalation

- There are some unusual circumstances in which a physical response to conflict may be necessary
 - ▶ Law enforcement
 - ▶ Military action
 - ▶ Self-defense
- In most circumstances, it is not
 - ▶ **Matthew 5:38-39** You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' (39) But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
 - ▶ **1Peter 3:8-9** To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; (9) not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Physical Escalation: Murder

- Easy to dismiss this as something we'd never do
- But recall
 - ▶ **1Corinthians 10:12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.
 - ▶ **Matthew 5:21-22** You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' (22) But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.
 - ▶ **1John 3:15** Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Escalation by Soliciting Allies

- A common scenario: going to others for support, instead of going to the person(s) with whom we have the conflict
- Examples
 - ▶ Conflict with your child's teacher: talk to other parents in the class
 - ▶ Conflict with Session: talk to other members
 - ▶ Conflict with boss: talk to your co-workers
 - ▶ Solicit allies by the ruse of a prayer request
- Common, but not right

Matthew 18:15-17 If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Escalation by Litigation

- Our society tends to encourage “solving” certain types of conflicts by law suits
 - ▶ Breach of contracts
 - ▶ Injuries and loss of property
 - ▶ Libel and slander
- The scriptural principle is a bit different

1Corinthians 6:1-8 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? (2) Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? (3) Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? (4) So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? (5) I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, (6) but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? (7) Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? (8) On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do this even to your* brethren.

What Does it Mean?

- Do not take *anyone* to civil court?
 - ▶ Phrases “between his brethren” and “brother goes to law with brother” preclude this
- Do not take to civil court *anyone who professes to be a Christian?*
 - ▶ Language seems to suggest a local church connection: “is not among you one wise man”
- Do not take to civil court anyone who is *a member in good standing of a Christian church*
 - ▶ This seems to be the most feasible meaning of the passage

Implication

- If church remedies are exhausted, and an offender is excommunicated, pursuing a suit in civil court *may* be a valid option
 - ▶ Offender is no longer a brother
- Be sure your reasons for pursuing a lawsuit are legitimate
 - ▶ “Rights you are trying to enforce are biblically acceptable”
 - ▶ “You have a righteous purpose”
 - ★ “Advance God’s kingdom by providing a positive Christian witness to those who observe the action”
 - ★ “Benefit your opponent” (“invoke power of the state” to “help the opponent to behave more responsibly in the future.”)
 - ★ “Enhance your ability to know and serve Christ” (“by preserving rights and resources needed to minister to others or to provide for those who depend on you”)

Complications

- What if you're not in the same church?
- What if offender's church does not handle the situation in a biblical way?
- What about criminal matters?
- What if situation involves organizations and not individuals?
- What if you are sued?

Items Discussed Today

- Reminder of the two main categories of escalation responses
 - ▶ Verbal escalation
 - ▶ Extra-verbal escalation
- Details about extra-verbal escalation
 - ▶ Physical responses
 - ▶ Getting others on your side
 - ▶ Litigation

For Next Week

- Homework — (1) Think about whether you have any current conflicts that you are escalating by soliciting allies
(2) Send to **conflict at logicteacher dot com** short descriptions of specific, fictitious conflicts that you'd like for us to discuss how to resolve
- Lesson — “Notwithstanding their conflicting interests and thoughts”

Note: Lesson title comes from Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Chapter 12: Some murderous conflict may well come to pass from all this, and that's what your brother Ivan is waiting for.