

No matter where you are, conflict is neither rare nor isolated. Conflict is a normal part of life. People encounter conflict at home, in the neighborhood, in school, at work, or even in the church. Maybe, some of you are surprised to hear that even the church experiences conflict. The church is a living organism, not a machine. The church is composed of people and each person is unique, so conflict is unavoidable.

The church is a spiritual hospital, so we should not expect people in the church to be perfect. People around you in this church are still “work-in-progress.” We’re not yet finished. Only God is perfect. Only our God doesn’t make mistakes. As long as you live among other people, your thoughts and actions will collide with those of others. Conflict is inevitable. Sometimes, you may be able to simply back off and go your own way. But you've probably discovered that walking away doesn't always work. Many relationships are far too important to abandon. Some issues are simply too big to ignore.

Aren't you tired of fighting or quarreling? Do you desire peace? Conflict surrounds our lives, from our homes to our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and churches. The question is: How do we make peace if conflict surrounds us? As you learn God's ways in resolving conflict, you will be able to view conflict as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, find solutions that are fair for everyone, and, most importantly, to please and honor God.

God's way of resolving conflicts begins with us understanding the gospel—all that Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross. God showers us with extraordinary, undeserved kindness through the gospel. And God’s grace empowers us to respond to others in a completely new way. God’s grace empowers us to respond to others with love and forgiveness even if they don’t deserve it. Once we understand how the good news of Jesus empowers genuine reconciliation, we can begin to learn and apply God’s practical steps to peacemaking.

No one is naturally good at maintaining peace. It always goes against our natural human instincts. However, the more we rely on God's power and wrestle with and obey what God teaches, the more effectively we can resolve disagreements with others.

As believers and followers of Jesus, we are expected to make every effort to live in peace. Hebrews 12:14 - “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (NIV)

**WORD**

Ken Sande said, “When two or three come together in Jesus’ name…there will soon be conflict.” It sounds funny but it’s true. Conflict occurs when you disagree with another person about what you believe, want, or do. Conflict can range from minor disagreements to major disputes, and it can result in not only hurt feelings but also real damage. Conflict begins when you don’t get what you want.

James 4:1-2 - “1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.” (NIV)

Conflict happens because our sinful nature happily cooperates with beliefs that say, "I can have whatever I want," and we will not fight it because we enjoy it, we enjoy being entitled. Unfortunately, conflict infiltrates Christian relationships in the same way that it does all other human relationships. Conflict occurs in different ways among us.

While many conflicts bring disastrous results, conflict isn’t always bad. Even the most mature of Christians experience conflict and can come out better for it. In the New Testament account of the early Christian church, we read that conflict erupted because some people complained that they were being shortchanged in the distribution of food.

Acts 6:1-6 - “1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” (NIV)

What can we learn from this incident? They addressed the concerns to make peace. They didn’t ignore the problem. Sometimes, we have a tendency to pretend that everything is ok, even if it’s not ok. For some, they like fake peace. However, the disciples didn’t turn a blind eye. The disciples knew their priorities but they also knew that conflicts should be resolved in order to have peace. The solution pleased everyone so the problem is solved. When conflict is handled properly, it can be beneficial.

According to the Bible, some conflicts arise as a result of God-given diversity. Each of us is a different part of the human body, an analogy used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. We each play an important role; we each bring unique perspectives and gifts to the body of Christ. Natural differences result from God's created diversity. We all have different opinions, convictions, desires, perspectives, and priorities because God created us as unique individuals.

God seeks unity rather than uniformity. Instead of avoiding all conflicts or expecting others to always agree with us, we can celebrate God's diversity and learn to accept and work with people who simply see things differently than we do. Unity means we are of one purpose, one mind, one heart.

Uniformity means we are clones of each other, with everyone looking, thinking, and acting the same. That’s why I keep on telling couples who are going through counseling with me, “Diversity should not hinder you to have unity.”

Other conflicts are caused by simple misunderstandings. Nobody on the planet is perfect at communicating, whether speaking or listening. Numerous conflicts arise when we believe we have spoken clearly or have listened and understood correctly, but we jump to the wrong conclusion. Our prejudices and impatience all contribute to our misunderstandings.

Unfortunately, as fallen humans, we have a tendency to take offense and assume the worst. God wants us to believe the best until we have reason to believe otherwise. We should give people the benefit of the doubt when they say something that has hurt us. Maybe, they don’t mean what they said or they just chose the wrong words to express what they feel.

Although much conflict is the natural result of God-given diversity and simple misunderstandings, many conflicts are the result of sinful attitudes and desires that lead to sinful words and actions. All of us say and do self-motivated, self-centered, sinful things—and those things all trigger conflict. Think again about James 4:1-2 - “1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.” (NIV)

The issue is not where we begin, but where we end up. The problem isn't that we're different; it's what we do about our differences. We rarely choose to give up our rights and work through our problems with others in a humble manner. Instead, we say, "It is my right. I'm correct. I've got to win." We have natural differences, but our sinful nature is really what makes conflict so destructive.

Idolatry is a sinful source of conflict. We know that as Christians, we should want what God wants, but when we allow an idol to control our hearts, we only want what we want. The only cure for idolatry is to return to God Himself, giving Him His rightful first place in our lives and deciding that His will for us is more important than any other desire.

Jesus said that our response to conflict can prove we are His followers. Not long before His death, Jesus told his closest followers: John 13:35 - “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (NIV)

In John 17:22-23, Jesus said, “22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (NIV)

The world will never know peace or harmony apart from Jesus. The world will be in conflict as we have observed at home, in the neighborhood, in the office, and in school. Yet our love for each other will prove to the world that we are Christians. Not only that but also our love for each other points to God Himself. People who witness our love will see God’s love.

Let us eagerly maintain the peace that is to be found in Christ. Peace and unity should be visible among us. People around us, especially the non-Christians, should see the peace and unity among Christians. Peace is not accidental. We have to be intentional. Peace requires us to merge our lives with God’s word regularly. Otherwise, we are just individual links who have proximity to one another but no unity and peace.

Relationships are so important before the Lord. In fact, God gave His one and only Son Jesus so He can forge relationships with us. To live consistently with the gospel means to pursue relational harmony. And this doesn’t just apply to some ideal church somewhere else. It applies to real people who can be really challenging. It’s in this context that we’re called to live consistently with the gospel we talk about in this church.

And this can only happen through Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “For Jesus Christ alone is our unity. ‘He is our peace.’ Through Him alone do we have access to one another, joy in one another, and fellowship with one another.”

**LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION:**

How is peacemaking costly? What does it require from us? What do we do when others do not reciprocate our efforts at peacemaking?

Do you need to make things right with someone today? Is there anyone you need to forgive? Do you need to ask for forgiveness from someone?

Is God revealing an area in your life where you need to make peace and settle disputes?