



## Conflict

Text: Ephesians 4:15-16  
Bible Teacher Ben Stuart

1. When faced with conflict, people can respond with flight or fight. Which of these do you primarily experience when entering into conflict? What practical insights regarding conflict did you glean from this week's message?
2. Conflict can be framed into two types: that which is non-moral and that which is moral. What are some possible examples for each? What are some distinguishing markers we can use to determine whether a conflict is moral or not?
3. Read Matthew 18:15-35. Matthew 18 offers some crucial perspectives that help us in our resolution work.
  - a. How is the offending party referred to in vv. 15, 21, and 35? What is the significance of this?
  - b. What is the connection between Jesus' teachings in vv.15-20 and vv.21-35?
  - c. In verses 15-17 Jesus lays out a pattern of due process for resolving grievances. What are the four steps he lays out and take it one step further and discuss what values you see lived out in each step.
  - d. Read verse 21. What do you think Peter is trying to figure out? Have you ever wrestled with this question yourself?
  - e. What is Jesus stressing in verses 22-34 in regards to how we deal with other people's "debts"?
  - f. How are you comforted, challenged or confused by what Jesus says in verse 35?
  - g. What is the connection between Jesus' teachings in vv.15-20 and vv.21-35?
4. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. Ben suggested that a good coach is always speaking up for the good of a player. Similarly, a good friend is someone who will point out your flaws – for your good.
  - a. Can you recall a time when someone did that for you?
  - b. What was the experience like in the moment?
  - c. Did your perspective change after some time had passed?

5. What is the ultimate goal of these sorts of conversations? Even though these sorts of conversations can be uncomfortable and difficult, what do we risk if we do not engage in such conversations?

Challenge: Think about the people, particularly the Christian brothers and sisters, in your life who you may need to speak the truth in love to. Commit to praying and beginning the first steps in this process.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, We praise You, that You prepare us and show us how to resolve conflict, how to confront one another and spur each other on toward righteousness. You are faithful God, and you equip us to obey and honor You. The need to confront and resolve conflict in a biblical way that preserves relationships and is a beneficial witness as Your followers is so important in our lives. Father give us wisdom. Through Your Holy Spirit help us to understand Your biblical answers for when to confront: when someone is in danger ([Proverbs 24:11-12](#)), when a relationship is threatened ([Philippians 4:2-3](#)), when division exists within a group ([Romans 14:19](#)), when someone sins against you ([Matthew 18:15](#)), when you are offended ([Ephesians 4:2-3](#)), when someone is caught in sin ([Ezekiel 3:18](#)), when others are offended ([Galatians 2:11-13](#)). Give us confidence to confront to honor You, not out of our own justice, but out of obedience to You. Give us wisdom to know the difference. Help us be peacemakers. Thank You for Your great love and Your kindness to us. Thank You for the clear direction we find in Your word that shows us the way we should go, confront, resolve, forgive and love. Lord, let us spread the truth of Your Gospel through our words and actions through our communities. Let us be quick to listen and slow to speak. But, let us not fail to speak Father, when You prompt us. Thank You for your Son, who came to set us free from sin and death, and for Your Holy Spirit that reminds us what Jesus taught us, and show us the way we should go.

We pray this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen!

## STUDY DEEPER

### 5 Prayers When Conflict Strikes

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-prayers-for-when-conflict-strikes>

Nobody likes conflict. Especially in ministry/church settings. (If you do, I suggest taking some time to pray!) But conflict is an unavoidable part of life, and when it comes, it can provide an opportunity to experience God's sanctifying work in our hearts—depending on how we walk through it.

How can we harness situations of conflict to make the most of them? These prayers do not completely answer that question, and of course some kinds of conflict are so severe, or provoked by such blatant sin, that they really call for a more decisive response. But even in extreme situations, prayers like these may prove a good starting point. And in the milder conflict we experience in the body of Christ on a regular basis, meditating on prayers like these could defuse much conflict before it even starts.

#### 1. Lord, give me a heart of mercy.

In Ephesians 4:32, Paul links his call to forgiveness with a call to tender-heartedness and kindness (“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another”). God doesn't merely call us to practice forgiveness—he calls us to practice a particular quality of forgiveness marked by warmth, joy, and the aroma of the gospel (“as in Christ God forgave you”).

Praying for a heart of mercy does not mean we lay aside legal redress or accountability for future wrongdoing. But it does mean we desire reconciliation and fellowship more than than winning; that we seek to redirect evil and look for pathways by which to turn it to good; that we absorb pain in order to aim at restoration and peace. “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18).

To pray for a heart of mercy amid conflict can be excruciatingly difficult, especially if you've been deeply sinned against. It feels a little bit like dying. It may require us to persevere in prayer for those who have wronged us, and “pray until we've prayed,” as the Puritans used to say. Above all, it will require a heart full of Christ's own kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness for us, from which we draw strength to practice the same.

#### 2. Lord, help me to stay positive amid negativity.

It's easy to get sucked into negativity. Nietzsche said, "Those who fight monsters should be careful lest they become monsters." It's easy to react against a real problem, but in the process become tainted by what we react against. For example, you rebuke the hot-headed and the aggressive, and find yourself getting a little heated. In observing the Pharisee, you notice judgments in your own heart against them. In sensing the pride of your neighbor, you find your own ego provoked (remember pride is essentially competitive). Perhaps that is why Paul, after calling for the restoration of the sinner, immediately adds, "Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

In order to keep unstained by the negativity and backbiting that conflict often engenders, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. Stephen, the church's first martyr, provides us with a wonderful example. When others gnash their teeth at him and stone him to death, he directs his eyes upward to heaven, where he sees the risen Christ in his glory (Acts 7:54-58). With his eyes fixed on Jesus, he is liberated to pray for the forgiveness of his enemies (Acts 7:60).

In order to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21) in the midst of conflict, we need to follow Stephen's example of keeping our eyes above the fray of the gnashing teeth and stones being hurled at us, and defining our situation by the ulterior reality and realm of Christ. As Robert Murray McCheyne put it, "For every look at self—take ten looks at Christ! Live near to Jesus—and all things will appear little to you in comparison with eternal realities."

3. Lord, help me not to take this criticism personally.

It's the most natural thing in the world to take criticism personally. It's as instinctive as flinching when a punch comes. But a defensive, self-referential spirit not only hinders ministry, it is in many respects the opposite of true ministry. We cannot minister to others, an essentially self-emptying act, when we are occupied with defending our own reputation or ego.

In fact, I have found that how we receive criticism is often one of the ripest opportunities for ministering to another person. When criticism comes, there is often something going on in the heart of the critic, something that many times has nothing to do with us. When our hearts are secure in Christ's love for us, we can better see these needs and respond to them.

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4. Lord, give me hope for this person's renewal.

When we are in conflict with others, their flaws tend to loom large in our hearts and minds. It can become easy to assume evil in their motives ("He's deliberately trying to undermine me"), or

reduce them to a caricature of their sins (“She’s just a gossip”), or exaggerate their hurtful tendencies (“They always do that”). Part of practicing the golden rule during conflict means that we do not exaggerate others vices and ignore their virtues. I find it helps to pray for God’s vision for a person’s progress in Christ, and then ask for grace to genuinely hope in that vision.

Dostoevsky famously quipped that to love another person is to see them as God sees them. When we’re in conflict with brothers or sisters in Christ, it can be helpful to envision them not as they currently are, but after they’ve been in worshiping among the angels for 100,000 years. Seeing people in this light not only informs our prayers for them, it also motivates and empowers those prayers.

5. Lord, how can I see my sin?

The default of our hearts toward self-justification can often lead us to neglect our own contribution to conflict, or at least minimize it in proportion to the other person’s contribution. In some conflicts one party may be the innocent lamb and the other the wicked wolf. But far more often the blame can be sliced 90/10, or 80/20, or 50/50, or some other fraction in which both numbers are greater than zero. And even in those rare situations of complete victimhood, it is healthy to remember that Jesus looked into Judas’s eyes, not with anger and self-defense, but with sadness and resignation to God’s will.

We need hearts full of the gospel in order to not feel threatened by owning our own part of the conflict. When we know that our sins have already been nailed to the cross, that our identity and standing does not hang in the balance with whether we “win” the conflict, it liberates us to examine our hearts and see how we might have contributed to the problems.

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When my own sin is not weighty to me, I often find it helpful to reflect on the second verse of the hymn “How Deep the Father’s Love For Us”:

Behold the man upon the cross  
My sin upon his shoulders  
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held him there  
Until it was accomplished  
His dying breath has brought my life  
I know that it is finished

After some reflection on these words, I may still need to go “reason frankly with (my) neighbor” (Lev. 19:17). But I hope I’m now doing so in a chastened mood, with greater openness to trust and greater expression of vulnerability, so as to make my appeal “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1).

