

## As Much As Depends On You

Principles of Conflict Resolution

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We live in a world that is full of conflict and contention within the human race. That is not a statement that you have not heard before or do not realize. There are idiotic, politically correct catch phrases such as, "Unity through diversity!" That is one of the ones that gets me very angry. Diversity in the United States has encouraged humanly unsolvable conflicts between races, ethnic groups, political parties, religions, and, just this past week, in hunting practices.

In the news this week, we heard of the Cambodian man who went onto private property to hunt, and when he was asked to leave, he shot four or five other hunters who had permission to hunt on that property. In Cambodia, there apparently are no property rights or respect for a person's life. In the words of Paul Harvey, "We are not one world!" even though the liberals and the globalists try to convince us that we are.

Other countries, especially gentile countries, view the sanctity of life and the importance of laws with less respect than that to which we have been accustomed here in the United States. However, there is one major exception to this country's respect for the sanctity of life, and that, of course, is abortion! The citizens of this country have already murdered more than forty million of its children. I wonder if there is anything that destroys a nation's opportunity for peace more than such a heinous act as ripping children from the womb. There is no real peace in this world.

Thus, we see that we cannot have true unity, in either this nation or this world. The contrast between God's people and the world, which parallels Satan's conflict of enmity toward God, is so striking that, in order for there to be peace, the God family will have to miraculously renew everything. That renewal has begun with us—the members of God's church.

Regarding unity, Paul instructs the Ephesian church to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

*Unity or oneness of the Spirit* refers to unity of devotion, unity of faith, unity of love. It means that we should be united in outlook and purpose and not be split into factions. Since there is but one Spirit that acts on our hearts to renew us, we should demonstrate the same feelings and views. The phrase *fruit of the spirit* indicates something that is a natural product of the Spirit rather than human nature. One of the areas from which we

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get that unity of spirit is the help of the Holy Spirit. One of the natural products of the Holy Spirit is peace!

Peace is God's gift to man, achieved by Him at the cross of Christ. It is peace with God and expresses itself both in peace of mind and, in a very practical sense, between all those who know God. This peace should be seen in the home, between Jew and Gentile, within the church, and in our relationships with all human beings—especially with those of the fellowship of Christ—as much as depends on you.

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, but is not produced without effort. Although it is a gift from God through Jesus Christ, peace has to be strived for, sought after, and pursued. Psalm 34:14 commands, "Seek peace and pursue it." We have a hymn that says, "Seek peace, pursue it earnestly." That word *earnestly* is very important, because that is exactly how we have to apply our peace: through earnest works with God. The importance of the word *peace* is evident from its frequent and extensive occurrence in the New Testament. It appears eighty times, and we find it in every book.

**Hebrews 12:14** Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

**I Peter 3:11** Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.

There is no doubt that the apostles, the writers of the books of the New Testament, emphasized how important peace is for every Christian. The pursuit of peace is not merely an elimination of discord but is produced by a conscious effort to bring it about. It is hard work.

**James 3:13-18** Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

We have an emphatic, specific, very clear statement of one of the things that we have to do as Christians, and that is to make peace. James tells us that a crop of righteousness

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cannot be produced in the climate of animosity and self-seeking. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace, and it must be sown and cultivated by the peacemakers. They not only love peace and live with peace of mind but also endeavor to promote conditions of peace wherever they go.

God grants peace as a gift through Jesus Christ. His suffering and sacrifice opened the way for peace between human beings and God, and between human beings and other human beings. Colossians 1:20 says that we "have peace through the blood of His cross"; that is, through the suffering and sacrifice of His life resulting in the forgiveness of sin.

What does depend on us? We have a Christian duty to pursue peace and to make an effort to promote conditions of peace. The Bible provides us with a simple yet effective way for resolving conflict, and those principles involve making peace. These principles are so simple that they can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts in daily life; but they are also so successful that they can be used to arbitrate any of the very worst conditions in our society: divorce, child custody actions, church divisions, business disputes, and abuse cases. The principles regarding peace contained within the inspired written Word of God can be applied to any aspect of life. These principles should be used to solve conflicts within the church and disagreements within the family. So, let us look at various principles that will help us to be peacemakers.

We must have a right perspective if we are going to pursue and make peace. Conflict is not necessarily destructive, and we fare far better if we view conflicts or differences of opinion in a right perspective. They provide an opportunity for glorifying God, serving others, and becoming more like Christ. The way that they provide those opportunities depends on the way that we handle conflict. Even when conflict is caused by sin, and produces a great deal of stress, God can use the conflict to develop righteous character in the persons with inconsistent views—provided the individuals apply godly principles to resolve a conflict.

**Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

All things work together for good; and that includes resolutions of conflict within families, among brethren, and in the world. The principle in Romans 8:28 is that the main beneficiaries of God's benevolence are those who love God and are called according to His purpose. When things in our lives work together for good, an immediate and ultimate benefit is peace. We go through life with peace of mind knowing that all things will work together to produce peace.

Paul especially encourages the church to focus on glorifying God in all that we do; as part of that, we must not offend others.

**I Corinthians 10:31-11:1** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

These verses present the right perspective. It is not just other people on whom Paul is focusing, but on God, the Creator and Giver of all things. The ultimate focus on God relates to our attitude toward others. The glory of God must be our goal in everything, and this helps to give us a right perspective on how to make peace. The ultimate focus on God relates to our attitude towards others. The glory of God must be our goal in everything and this right perspective is the only way to have true peace. It holds true for family and marriage relationships, friendships, and in all relationships in life.

Paul is emphasizing the truth that doing all for the glory of God means thinking of the good of others, both Christians and non-Christians, as we see in verse 32. We see contained within these verses the two great Commandments: love God and love your neighbor. These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts, because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or concentrate on overcoming their opponent. It is wise to occasionally step back from a conflict and ask ourselves whether we are doing all that we can to take advantage of these opportunities to promote peace.

When the apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live "to glorify God," he wanted them to show God honor and reverence in all their thoughts and actions. He was encouraging them to give a true witness of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ in everyday life. He admonished them to live God's way of life 24/7. Included in "whatever you do" in verse 31 is the way in which we resolve personal conflicts. Do we look at a conflict as an opportunity to develop a right perspective, to "do all to the glory of God"? Or do we shun the conflict and run away from it at the expense of losing a friend or family member?

One of the most challenging principles of making peace is revealed in Matthew 7.

**Matthew 7:5** Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

If we consider two kinds of planks when looking at personal conflict, we see that both

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prevent us from seeing a conflict clearly. It may be that we may have had a critical, negative, overly-sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. Whether it is the plank or the splinter in the eye, both inhibit clarity.

One of the best ways to avoid this is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4. It describes the kind of attitude that we should have, even when we are involved in a conflict. Because we went over these virtues in detail in the sermonette before this sermon, I will not go over them again for lack of time. These are things on which we should meditate very heavily. They are very important for developing and promoting peace.

**Philippians 4:5-9** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Also, God will give us peace of mind as a result of doing these things. We see how important developing virtues in our lives is in the development of peace—not only in our lives but also in other people's lives. It is something that we have to pursue and work at with the help of God's Holy Spirit. Too often, though, we forget about such righteous qualities and the lack of them causing our own conflicts.

It may be that we have to deal with our use of harsh words and actions against someone. Some may very well be inappropriate for a Christian. We are often blind to our own sins and may need help from a friend who will help us to take an objective look at ourselves or the comments we made. He may be able to help us face up to our contribution to a conflict. We should call upon our friends in the church to help us with conflict. Many times there are things that others see in us that we cannot.

When we identify ways that we have wronged another person, it is important to admit our wrongs honestly and thoroughly. Consider seven factors that are needed to admit injury to someone else:

1. We should admit specifically any mistake we made—either in attitude or in

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action—because this is the first step in developing humility. People are more apt to receive a humble person. The most important aspect of getting the plank out of your own eye is to change your own behavior and attitude. By doing, that we dissolve that plank in our own eyes. This means that we have to admit our own shortcomings; and we have to do that with prayer, asking God to help us. Humility is not a natural process for a human being; we need God's help.

2. We should not make excuses for our earlier actions. Reasons are one thing; excuses are quite another. With regard to hurting someone, a reason is an explanation or justification of an action or attitude toward someone; but an excuse is a pretend reason for conduct or attitude. Excuses do not work, because there is an insincerity in them that is not trustworthy and that comes through in trying to work out conflict in a peaceful way with other individuals.
3. We should acknowledge the hurt we caused by expressing genuine sorrow because peace is fed by and promoted by real compassion and empathy.
4. We should accept the consequences, especially if it means we must make restitution because it is important to uphold justice.
5. We should overcome the negative behavior by changing our attitudes and actions because peace will not last if the same mistakes or offenses are made again. Also, God tells us that we are required to overcome our sins.
6. We should face up to and apologize to the person we have offended or hurt because peace comes only if offense ends in remorse.
7. We should ask for forgiveness because peace comes only if there is forgiveness. Otherwise, resentment will last a lifetime. Also, it gives the offended person an opportunity to help end the conflict.

These seven factors—some of them overlap; some of them are very similar—are the things that are needed to really and truly admit injury to someone else. In considering these factors, we begin to see more clearly, because they put the conflict in a right perspective. They are very hard things to do.

Idolatry leads to conflict. Anytime we become excessively preoccupied with something—even a good thing—and seek to find happiness, security, or fulfillment in it rather than in God, we are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God and causes conflict with other people.

As James writes, when we want something but do not get it, we kill and covet, quarrel and fight. He expresses the principle that conflict comes from the desires that battle in our heart.

**James 4:1-2** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not

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come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

This is one of those scriptures that we have probably heard the most over the years. Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to your will, or have revenge. Quite often, conflict is fueled by good desires that we have elevated to sinful demands, such as a craving we allow to turn into an obsession. Food or alcoholic beverages are often abused this way. In a family, these abuses always develop into major conflicts.

How can we overcome the idolatry that fuels conflict? In a very similar way to the factors we considered for admitting injury. First, we should ask God to help us see where we have been guilty of neglecting Him. Second, we should specifically identify and reject each of the desires contributing to the conflict. Third, we should deliberately pursue a right relationship with God. We need to fix our hearts and minds on God's will rather than our own, seeking joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction in Him alone.

As God guides and empowers these efforts, we can find freedom from idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make right choices that will please and honor God. This change of heart will usually speed a resolution to a present problem and at the same time improve our ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future. We will also develop a closer relationship with the person with whom the conflict was, in many cases—not in all cases.

How do we help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict? I have been talking about how we can work on our side of the conflict. What if the other person is a major cause of the conflict, and we do not know how to deal with him? When we think about talking to someone else about a conflict, one of the verses that come to mind is Matthew 18:15.

**Matthew 18:15** Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

If this verse is read in isolation, it seems to teach that we must always use direct confrontation to force others to admit that they have sinned. If the verse is read in context, we see that Jesus had something much more flexible and beneficial in mind than simply standing toe to toe with others and describing their sins. All of us know from experience if we go toe to toe with someone, the opposite of peace happens. It just

increases the conflict.

Just before this verse, we find Jesus' wonderful metaphor of a loving shepherd who goes to look for a wandering sheep and then rejoices when it is found. In this way, verse 15 is introduced with a theme of restoration, not condemnation. When we go to someone to explain to them about a sin, we are looking to restore and not to condemn them. Jesus repeats this theme just after telling us to "go and tell him his fault" by adding, "If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

Then He hits the restoration theme a third time in verses 21-35, where He uses the parable of the unmerciful servant to remind us to be as merciful and forgiving to others as God is to us. Jesus is obviously calling for something much more loving and healing than simply confronting others with a list of their wrongs.

Galatians 6:1 gives us positive direction on what our attitude and purpose should be when we go to our brother: We are to bear and share burdens. Keep in mind that the overall theme of this sermon is actually being a peacemaker. These are specific ways of doing so.

**Galatians 6:1** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Again, we see the theme of restoration with an emphasis on the approach—that of gentleness.

Our attitude should be one of gentleness rather than anger, and our purpose should be to restore rather than condemn. We see that very clearly here.

The situation in verse 1 is one that, more than any other, inevitably reveals the real character and spiritual maturity of a member of God's church who goes to that other person. Here, Paul is imagining a hypothetical situation in which one member unexpectedly learns that another member is trapped in some sin. What should we do in these circumstances? Should we overlook the sin, or should we expose the sin? This is something that I am sure goes through our minds when these types of things happen. Paul shows that a true member of God's church being led by the Spirit of God should not proceed in either of these ways. Paul spells out the proper course of action by showing what to do, who should do it, and how it should be done.

First, Paul says that members of God's church are to restore the person who has fallen

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into sin. The verb restore, *katarizo*, is a medical term in secular Greek for setting a fractured bone. That is an interesting word for Paul to use here. Paul's point is that what is wrong in the life of the fallen fellow member is to be set straight. It should not be neglected or exposed openly—neither of those two extremes.

Second, Paul says that the work of restoring must be done by those who are spiritual. The word *spiritual—pneumatikos*—in verse 1 cuts two ways. On the one hand, it is obviously related to Paul's use of it at the end of Galatians 5.

**Galatians 5:25-26** If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

He basically says, "Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual Christian instead of a worldly Christian? Then there is a way you can test it. Restoring an erring brother is exactly the kind of thing that spiritual members of God's church do." What Paul is saying there is that if you are in God's church and you have God's Holy Spirit, then your method will be to restore a person. If it is someone who is not converted, someone in the world, their method will be to condemn the person. This is one of the ways that shows whether a person is of God or not.

On the other hand, Paul is reminding us that only those who are genuinely led by the Spirit have the maturity to deal with sin in others. Every member of God's church should want this spiritual maturity. Basically, I believe that Paul is saying that people who are new in the church may be too spiritually immature to go to another person and approach them on these things. I am not saying that he is saying that; I am saying that maybe there is an indication there that this should not be done until spiritual maturity is developed. It is something to think about, anyway.

Third, in verse 1, Paul says that the restoration should be made "gently." He uses the same word when listing the fruit of the Spirit in Ephesians 5:23. This gentle restoration should be made with the awareness that none—no matter how spiritual—have immunity from temptation and that all can fall.

Let us next look at conflict within a marriage. Some marriages start off on the wrong foot. I would like to give you a light-hearted example here because so much of this is serious, and it helps to just ease pressure somewhat.

Two neighbors were talking over the back fence.

"I went to a wedding this weekend," said one, "but I don't think the marriage

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will last."

"Why not?" asked the other.

"Well, when the bride said 'I do,' the groom said, 'Don't use that tone of voice with me.'"

It is funny that some people really do not have a clue when it comes to having a peaceful life. This fictional anecdote illustrates the contention with which some people begin their marriages. We know very well that if they do not deal with it right away, there is going to be a serious problem. Those of you women who are looking for a husband might want to check out that part of his attitude first before you get up to the "I do's."

The prideful nature of human beings guarantees conflict within a marriage, no matter how much spouses are committed to each other. It is how husbands and wives handle these conflicts that determines whether or not the result will be peaceful. The general idea here in I Corinthians 15 is that of keeping your marriage vows and the principles of marriage.

**I Corinthians 7:10-15** Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

That really emphasizes the importance of peace in a marriage. If it is emphasized in such a great way here, it is something that we should really work to have within our marriages. We have to pursue and seek it. If peace cannot be obtained by living together, there should be a peaceful separation. When such a separation has taken place, the one that has departed should be encouraged to remain separate in peace. There should still not be contention if at all possible. God has called us to live in peace with all if we can. This biblical principle should always guide us in our relationships with our spouses, as well as in all other relationships and circumstances.

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**I Corinthians 7:16** For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

I know I have seen, in the years that I have been attending God's church, many instances in which the wife has remained faithful and the husband has even been antagonistic toward her, and she has labored under that situation, and eventually the husband has come into the church. It depends on God whether a person is going to be called or not, but the witness of the spouse in God's church certainly is a factor in it. If it is at all possible, or if it is God's will at that time that the person is going to be called, then that witness will certainly be helpful. The strength of verse 16 restrains any tendency to encourage a split in the marriage. Paul is teaching that the member of God's church is to try to keep the mixed-belief marriage together in the hope that the witness of the member will be used by God to call and convert the unbelieving spouse. The realistic condition of verse 16 indicates that there is a good hope that God, in His providence, will do just that.

Peace is not necessarily the absence of problems, but it is the ability to confidently work with God to solve problems. It is the miracle fruit that produces harmony. When we produce good fruit sown in peace, our relationship becomes agreeable and cooperative. I think very often we underestimate the power and importance of peace.

However, sometimes a problem in marriage—or in any other personal relationships, for that matter—is a problem that cannot just be overlooked because of its seriousness. It may be that it dishonors God or that it will permanently hurt the relationship. It is possible that it is seriously hurting people or that it is hurting the offending spouse himself. Then we have to humbly go and talk with the offending spouse privately, gently, and lovingly, without condescension about the situation.

**II Timothy 2:23-26** But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

*Barnes' Notes* gives this advice regarding correcting those who are in opposition, those who embrace error and array themselves against the truth:

"We are not to become angry with such persons, and denounce them at

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once as heretics. We are not to hold them up to public reproach and scorn; but we are to set about the business of patiently "instructing them." Their grand difficulty, it is supposed in this direction, is, that they are ignorant of the truth. Our business with them is, "calmly to show them what the truth is." If THEY are angry, WE are not to be. If they oppose the truth, we are still calmly to state it to them. If they are slow to see it, we are not to become weary or impatient. Nor, if they do not embrace it at all, are we to become angry with them, and denounce them. We may pity them, but we need not use hard words. This is the apostolic precept about the way of treating those who are in error; and can any one fail to see its beauty and propriety? Let it be remembered, also, that this is not only beautiful and proper in itself; it is the WISEST course, if we would bring others over to our opinions. You are not likely to convince a man that you are right, and that he is wrong, if you first make him angry; nor are you very likely to do it, if you enter into harsh contention. You then put him on his guard; you make him a party, and, from self-respect, or pride, or anger, he will endeavor to defend his own opinions, and will NOT yield to yours. "Meekness" and "gentleness" are the very best things, if you wish to convince another that he is wrong. With his HEART first, and then modestly and kindly show him "what the truth is," in as few words, and with as unassuming a spirit, as possible, "and you have him."

I thought that was interesting how Barnes looked at that. He has some good principles in there, and he worded them so well that I thought that it was worthwhile reading.

Consider dealing with the situation, and approaching the offending spouse, with these nine things in mind:

1. Pray for humility and wisdom in handling the conflicts. (Proverbs 6:3 states a principle that is tied to usury, but it still applies to contentions in marriage, assuming you and your wife are friends: "So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; for you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; plead with your friend.")

2. Plan your words carefully, putting yourself in your spouse's shoes. How would you want to be confronted?

**Luke 6:31** And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

3. Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses. Rehearse your

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response in your mind first.

**Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.

4. Choose the right time and place. Talk face to face with the person if possible. Everything has its proper time.

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8** To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

We must choose the right time to approach someone, even if it is having to do with our spouse and a conflict or disagreement.

5. Assume the best about the other person until you have the facts to prove otherwise.

**Proverbs 11:27** He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil.

6. Listen carefully! Simply listen carefully. We all, as human beings, have a problem with listening more than we have a problem with speaking.

**Proverbs 18:13** He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.

7. Speak only to build others up, to be uplifting

**Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

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8. Ask for feedback from the other person. What does he or she think about what you brought up?

9. Recognize your limits. Only God can change people.

**Romans 12:18** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

If an initial conversation does not resolve a conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow-up conversation. Never give up on your friend or your spouse.

We are not peaceful naturally, as human beings. Paul said that we do not even know the way to peace on our own. We should ask God to show us how unpeaceful we really are, and He will show us that striving to have it our way encourages conflict. We will see how we have upset the peace so many times by wanting to get rather than to give. Let me illustrate what I mean with something light-hearted again.

"I was relaxing in my favorite chair on Sunday," said one office worker to another, "reading the newspaper, watching a ball game on television and listening to another on the radio, drinking beer, eating a snack, and scratching the dog with my foot—and my wife has the nerve to accuse me of just sitting there doing nothing!"

I fear too many of you wives can identify with that, while your husbands do not have a clue to its reality.

Once God has shown us how contentious we have been, we must repent. Push out those raging desires to win that argument or disagreement. We may win the argument, but we may lose our marriage in the process.

Yield to God's peaceful Spirit by turning God's inspired thoughts of peace into action. We should always give our spouse that soft answer that turns away wrath.

**Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

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We must remember to overcome evil with good. It takes two to fight, but it takes only one to give. We must give our spouse peace and let that peace that surpasses all human understanding fill our marriage. Peace is a wonderfully unique fruit produced by the Holy Spirit. Seeking to develop peace is to pursue genuine forgiveness to others. Even though we have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to reflect that forgiveness to others.

As a result of an insincere attitude, we may sometimes unconsciously use variations of statements such as, "I forgive him—but I don't want anything to do with him again." That, of course, is the extreme. What if God said that to us? How would we feel? That would be very hurtful. What if He said, "I forgive you; I just do not want anything to do with you again"? Of course, we are so thankful that God is not that way—and neither should we be. We can be thankful that He never says that! He inspired the apostle Paul to instruct us to bear with one another.

**Colossians 3:12-13** Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

The terms *bearing with* and *forgive* expand the thought of longsuffering. Paul uses them to show that we, who are truly longsuffering, will manifest this attitude by a willingness to bear with those whose faults or unpleasant traits are an irritant to us. We will be willing to forgive those against whom we have grievances. *Bearing with* indicates the thought of putting up with things we dislike in others. *Forgive* has the sense of forgiving freely. When you combine these two, we are putting up with a lot; we are putting up with whatever it takes. We are willing to forgive everything freely.

Forgiving another person is not a one-time action, but it is a long-term commitment. The real continuation of the process of forgiveness requires four things:

1. That we do not think about this incident again.
2. That we do not bring up this incident again.
3. That we do not talk to others about this incident.
4. That we do not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder

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our personal relationship.

Forgiveness is a spiritual process that we cannot fully accomplish on our own. As we seek to forgive others, we should continually ask God for the humble attitude to enable us to reflect His loving forgiveness toward us.

It is not wrong to negotiate an agreeable solution. Sometimes we seem to think of negotiation as being a wrong thing, because we think of negotiations in the world as being nasty. Even when we manage to resolve personal offenses through confession and forgiveness, we may still need to deal with issues that may involve money, property, or the exercise of certain rights. These issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in a biblically faithful manner. As a general rule, we should try to negotiate these issues in a cooperative rather than a competitive way. Instead of aggressively pursuing our own interests and letting others look out for themselves, we should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone.

The dictionary definition of *negotiation* is "to discuss with the goal of finding terms of agreement." It is sad that in this society, many people interpret negotiation as being the skill of persuading other people to accept their point of view. In this awful society, that is the way that it has become, but that is not the way it should be in the church, among church members, and among family members—or anywhere else for that matter. Today, when we hear that a man is a good negotiator, it usually means that he "comes out on top of the deal" and that he "gets the best of the other person."

Business today is flooded with books, magazine articles, and seminars about negotiating; and, of course, the Internet gives more than enough advice on it. Success in business has often been equated with a person's negotiating skills. Promoters suggest the use of intimidation to win. Some recommend compromising in a very limited way or letting the other person win on an insignificant point, but only as a last resort. The goal is to overpower the other people or other person or at least to "talk them into it." That is not true biblical negotiation. The result of such worldly negotiation is that an agreement is struck to the advantage of one person and to the detriment of the other. Also, seeds of disagreement and retaliation are often sown that can have unforeseen future results.

What, then, is the right way to negotiate? Find out what the needs of the

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other person are and try to meet them without losing sight of your own goals. That is the general principle involved.

**Philippians 2:3-4** Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

There is biblical negotiating. The goal is to reach an agreement of mutual accord. Often it requires sacrifice on the side of one of the contenders. A true Christian will sacrifice personal desires but not personal spiritual convictions.

We cannot try to attribute our motives to other people; we should find out what they want. It is so logical for us to have such a high regard for our own opinions and motives that we assume that any other intelligent person must think the same way. What this exposes is our own selfish ambition or conceit. The requirements to reach agreements and the opportunity for solving problems while helping others to achieve their goals takes place daily in our lives.

Benevolent negotiation is a valuable skill to teach members of a family, including children. Church and personal family members should try to sensitize themselves to discern the needs and emotions of others in the family. Sometimes, what may at first seem completely adversarial positions can be worked out so that the opposing people become allies in achieving a mutual goal. Sometimes it is just that they are looking at the same goals from different perspectives. In a marriage, it is heart-warming to find a solution that meets both the husband's and the wife's needs, whether agreeing on how many children to have or being in accord on what to spend the money.

The proper attitude and outlook in coming to terms with potentially annoying differences is to just acknowledge and enjoy the differences. I want to give you an example:

John, an avant-garde painter, got married. Someone asked the bride a few weeks after the wedding, "How is married life, Helen?" "It is great," she answered. "My husband paints, I cook; then we try to guess what he painted and what I cooked."

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If you look at marriage that way, you can go a long way to have peace.

Any response to conflict risks the possibility of the other person having a hardened heart. It may be that a person just will not reconcile with his spouse. How would a person mentally prepare for this possibility? We have gone through some of those principles.

In this sense, God does not measure success in terms of results but in terms of faithful obedience. We cannot force anyone to act a certain way; therefore, God judges the situation with regard to personal responsibility. Is each person carrying out his own responsibility in the matter? Many times in a conflict in marriage, both are not fulfilling their responsibility and one has a hardened heart.

We have to resolve in our own minds that we will not give up on finding a biblical solution. Many times when a dispute is not easily resolved, people tend to say, "Well, I tried all the biblical principles I know, and they just did not work. It looks as though I will have to handle this in another way [meaning, the world's way]." We do not say those exact words, but many times in marriage I think people think that way.

We should never give up on the principles in the Bible. When we try to resolve a conflict but do not see the results we want, we should seek God more earnestly through prayer, Bible study, and the counsel from His church.

**Proverbs 11:14** Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

As we do these things, we have to stay focused on all God has already done for us and be appreciative of them and realize that we must learn to forgive as God does. Paul expresses several principles here with regard to behaving like a Christian. To be a peacemaker, we have to be recognized as one who aims to live at peace with our fellow human beings.

**Romans 12:14-21** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as

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much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This peace-loving attitude may be costly, at times, because some will want to take advantage of it, figuring the Christian principles will not permit the wronged party to retaliate. What are we to do? Our responsibility is clear: We are not to take vengeance. This would be to intrude on God's responsibility as the great Judge of all.

We have to face the facts. No one, of and by his own strength, can make complete and lasting peace with others. That type of peace comes only from God. Before we can receive that help, we need to be at peace with God Himself.

Peace with God does not come automatically, because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from Him. Sadly, when we sin, our iniquities make a separation between us and our God, and our sins hide His face from us so that He does not hear. Because human beings are not inclined to live the righteous lives needed to enjoy fellowship with Him, each of us has a stained record. As a result, we deserve to be eternally separate from God.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**John 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Believing in Jesus means more than just going to church and trying to be a good person. None of these efforts can erase the sins that we have already committed and will continue to commit throughout our lives.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand

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that we should walk in them.

Believing in Jesus means that we are convicted that Jesus paid the full penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. It means trusting that He took our sinful record on Himself and paid the penalty for it in full. Believing in Jesus means that we have counted the cost, repented, and are willingly overcoming our sins continually. We must overcome sin as we work with God to develop perfect character. Out of that perfect character should come a peaceful life.

Jesus Christ made it possible for us to receive His righteous mind, making it possible for us to really have true peace with God. As we receive this peace, God will give us an increasing ability to make peace with others by increasingly producing the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Paul wrote at length about justification by faith in Romans 4. He wraps up the chapter by explaining that Jesus Christ's work was accepted by God, thereby guaranteeing our justification. This acceptance is evidenced by Christ's resurrection.

**Romans 5:1-2** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

*Therefore* in verse 1 indicates that the immediate benefit of justification is that we have peace with God. The justified members of the body of Christ receive this peace with God because of this justification by faith. To have faith is to be spiritually minded. Elsewhere, Paul says that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

**Romans 5:3-9** And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still

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sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Justification is a declaration that God has made a judgment. Justification is a legal act on God's part to impute the righteousness of Jesus Christ to us once we have accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. It puts us in alignment with God and His law. What this does is give us peace with God.

**Romans 5:10-11** For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

With this reconciliation comes that peace with God. We have to work at it, though, and pursue it and make sure that it is developed in us as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Sinners are the enemies of God, because of their rebellion. Enemies cannot promote peace. The sinner is always somewhat troubled and his natural state of distress makes it impossible for him to have true peace of mind. However, as God calls a person, He begins the process of salvation and the process toward true peace. God began to show His willingness to be reconciled through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. He is willing to forgive and be at peace with us. What could be more wonderful than to have peace in such an unpeaceful world?

This peace cannot be received from the world; it is a result—a fruit—of the Holy Spirit of God. We have peace with God and access by faith to His grace through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Once we have that peace with God, we can begin to reflect true peace to our friends, family, and brethren. This depends on our peaceful relationship with God.

**Romans 12:18** If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

To live in a state of peace with our neighbors, friends, and family is not always easy. The person who loves God must work hard for peace. It is essential and necessary, even for our own sake. We cannot have fights and conflicts with others without having our own peace significantly disturbed.

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In order to have peace of mind, we have to be peaceful with everyone, whether they will be at peace with us or not. Paul knew that it would be difficult to get into and maintain such a state of peace. We see this clearly in his own words: "If it is possible, as much as depends on us, live peaceably." Though it is barely possible, we must work hard for it, as much as depends on us. A true Christian lives peacefully because of his peaceful relationship with God that is reflected to all human beings. Thus, we see that peace is such an essential part of our Christian lives and character. It is absolutely necessary and is something that we have to work at and pursue.