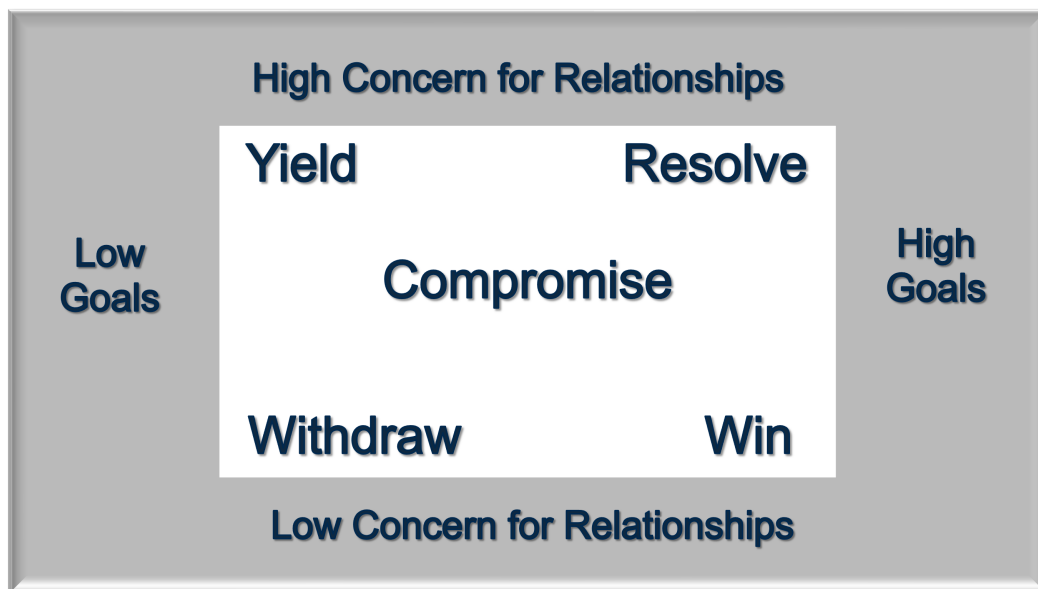


## **Conflict in Relationships and in the Church**

**By Pastor Edward Conway, D.Min.**

**Introduction:** Webster defines conflict as “a fight or struggle; sharp disagreement or opposition; emotional disturbance resulting from a clash of opposing impulses or from an inability to reconcile impulses with realistic or moral considerations.” One thing we can be sure of is where two or more gather together conflict will be part of the mix.

1. Conflict in the early church
  - a. Dispute over doctrine - Acts 15
  - b. Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas – Acts 15
  - c. Disagreement between Paul and Peter – Galatians 2
  - d. Disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche – Philippians 2
  - e. Divisions, quarrels, foolishness – 1 Corinthians 1; 2 Timothy 2:23-24; Titus 3:9
2. Variety of means in dealing with conflict
  - a. A judicial process for gross unrepentant sin - Matthew 18:15 – 20
  - b. A relational process among friends - Galatians 6:1-5; Philippians 4:2-3; James 5
  - c. A choice not to take offense – Philippians 1:15-18; 1 Peter 4:8; Matthew 5:39
  - d. A choice to leave it in God’s hands and bless the offender – Romans 12:9-21
  - e. A sinful response: gossip under the cover of prayer, passive-aggressive behavior, a root of bitterness and anger – Proverbs 16:28; 14:29; 15:1; 15:28; 16:32; 19:11; 25:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:29-30; 2 Timothy 3:1-3; Hebrews 12:15
3. How do we handle conflict in relationships? How do we respond?



4. The Role of Church Leaders – Prevention and Protection
  - a. Teach toward transformation, Colossians 2:6 – 3; 1 Timothy 4-6; 2 Timothy
  - b. Help people discern the best means to process conflict, see section 2.
  - c. Avoid foolishness, quarrels, correct with grace, 2 Timothy 3: 23-26
  - d. Avoid foolish controversies, don't engage divisive people, Titus 3:8-11
  - e. Protect, judge, and purge from evil, 1 Corinthians 5-6; 3 John 9-10
5. Practical Principles and Process
  - a. Explore your own internal expectations and hurts, first. Write them out using short sentences. How have you contributed to the conflict?
  - b. Bring your situation to the Scriptures and Prayer. What does the Bible say? What is the Holy Spirit saying? If you are married, what does your spouse have to say? Note: The Holy Spirit will never contradict the Bible.
  - c. If you have difficulty in doing this inner soul work seek a referral from the senior pastor or from a professional (licensed and under the supervision of an agency) Christian counselor. Note: If the conflict poses a risk to a child report it to your state office of Youth and Children Services; Massachusetts hot line number is 800.792.5200.
  - d. If you have done the above, pray for a specific time and place to share your concern with the person. Be humble about it, and if the person asks what you want to talk about be specific and clear. Go in private with the goal of restoring the relationship. If the conflict involves the senior pastor, speak with the senior elder or speak with a professional (licensed and under the supervision of an agency) Christian counselor.
  - e. Process the conflict in a godly way. Don't bring your concern to others under the guise of prayer and concern; that's gossip. If you need help seek a referral from the senior pastor or from a professional (licensed and under the supervision of an agency) Christian counselor.

### **So, What? Now, What?**

Processing through conflict can be challenging and complex task. A few thoughts for reflection: (1) Affirm the complexity of communication and emotions; don't assume you understand it all. (2) Communicate face to face; talk don't text. (3) Live in the light; deal with personal sin. (4) Resist the urge to hate; avoid mob/group think mentality. (5) Be a person of grace; think the best about others. (6) Be able to express Biblical options and truth. (7) If you need help, please seek a referral from the senior pastor or from a professional (licensed and under the supervision of an agency) Christian counselor.