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Resolving Conflict in Relationships Biblically



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When it comes to conflict in relationships, Ken Sande says there are really only three kinds of people: peace-fakers, peace-breakers, and peace-makers.

Peace-breakers are prideful and power up. If they don't get their way, they blow up, escalating conflict like gas on a flickering flame.

Peace-fakers avoid conflict or clam up trying to shove conflict under the rug out of fear.

Neither way is glorifying or healthy.

Peace-makers see conflict as an assignment, not an accident. They approach the problem with humility, reasonableness, and seeking wisdom from God ([James 3:17-18](#)). They do not intimidate, but they also do not hide. They expect conflict, embrace the opportunity to resolve things biblically, and have an urgency to keep unity in the midst of hard times.

Recently, I considered the relational landscape of my life. I have not ignored the conflict in my life, but am I doing everything, as far as it has to do with me, to keep the peace with others ([Romans 12:9-21](#))? What would it look like to be a peace-maker in those situations and relationships?

Is there anyone in your life you are bitter toward or someone you have offended deeply? I want to challenge you to get your eyes off another's sin and turn your focus inward with a vertical orientation ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)).

But the Bible never treats the symptoms alone... we have all tried to control our anger or appease someone else's with a moment of kindness—but it goes deeper. Sometimes the only way to heal what is sick or broken is to get to the source, to seek true healing, to go vertical.

The Source of Conflict

Don't you love it when God answers our most profound questions?! Hey, why do we fight anyway? Why can't we just get along? Consider this passage

from [James 4:1-12](#), which gets to the heart of the problem.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? ...

What Can We Learn about Conflict from This Passage?

The Word of God presents some very clear reasons why we can't seem to lay down our agendas or get along well with others who differ from us.

- **The enemy is within us:** We see early in this passage that conflict is internally motivated before externally manifested (your selfish passions are what you fight about most... even good desires have a way of morphing into demands!)
- **It's not just what we want, its how much we want it:** where are you coveting?

Fill in the blank: "If I only had _____, I would be happy?" That is the beginning of constructing an idol. So, think about these four escalating steps of selfish desires:

I. I want it too much – it could be a good desire or an evil desire (not always sinful... God may still be in the picture, but kingdoms begin to collide).

II. I need it now – it now owns you (leads to sin because looking to someone or something to fulfill only what Christ can... God can't meet this need or won't... so I will).

III. I deserve it – it now controls you (sinful entitlement creates murderous thoughts and feelings if desire is blocked... God wants me to be happy or is an afterthought at best).

IV. You will give it to me or I will punish you – it now betrays you (even hurt those you love if your demands are not met... is God even in the picture at this point?).

Here are three more truths from this passage:

1. **We need to get our eyes on our own sin!** (where are you trying to change someone else?) If she only would.... if he quit....
2. **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble:** Godly humility makes a world of difference (where do you need to repent, mourn, and stop contributing to the fight?)
3. **Keep walking in repentance not judgment** (where has resentment or bitterness crept in... and made you a judge not a keeper of the law?)

That sets up the problem well, but there is more grace! The second half of the chapter teaches us to truly repent and turn to the Lord so we can be a peace-maker in the situation. Consider [verses 7-10](#) as the way out of your side of the conflict and into the graces of God.

Seven Steps out of this selfish cycle of personal conflict:

1. **Submit** to God – what are you holding away from Him?
2. **Resist** the devil – what are you giving over to Him?
3. **Draw** near to God – where are you hiding or running from Him?
4. **Cleanse** your hands – what outward behavior needs to stop?
5. **Purify** your heart – what inward attitude needs to change?
6. **Be wretched mourn and weep** – where do people need to see godly sorrow?
7. **Humble yourself** – where do you need to admit you're wrong and ask forgiveness?

Remember, those who are in Christ are called to be peace-makers. That requires for us to be intentional with how we deal with conflict.

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