

Biblical Conflict Resolution

BY LAURA BERNERO

*This post originally appeared on the blog of **Anderson Allen LLC**, a Christian Mediation firm based in Denver. Founders Rachel Anderson and Shannon Allen share their perspective on how the Bible informs and instructs believers in relational conflict, and how that guides their practice as attorneys and mediators.*

Check back on the blog later this week for an interview sharing why how these lawyers have integrated the practices of litigation and Christian mediation.

Relational conflict is hard. Facing it is uncomfortable. Experiencing conflict affects our daily rhythms and routines. Conflict can even cause us to doubt God's goodness, His will for our lives, or His love for us. But, in fact, God often uses conflict to refine our character, draw us closer to Him, and, ultimately, to glorify Himself.

The Bible is full of wisdom about how believers should handle conflict, yet far too many Christians end up handing their disputes over to the secular court to decide their fate – an outcome that will be determined by worldly statutes, rules, and regulations that may or may not align with Biblical wisdom or a party's Christian worldview and values. Biblical principles for conflict resolution can be applied to any type of conflict. And we believe scripture provides the *best* approach to conflict resolution, one that will result in lasting peace if both parties will only commit to following God's ordained methods.

As divorce attorneys, we have represented countless Christians whose marriages were in crisis, for whom traditional Christian marital counseling did not reconcile the marriage, and who felt they had no other option but to pursue a divorce. According to some counts, Christians actually divorce at a *higher* rate than non-Christians. And most Christians divorce the same way that non-Christians divorce: submitting their dispute to the secular Court when they can not resolve their legal disputes themselves. The same could be said for Christians in business disputes or Christian friends or family members in interpersonal conflict: As Christians, we just don't "do" conflict well. And no wonder!

In our experience, the Church has not equipped believers to address conflict biblically. Churches themselves aren't equipped to support members struggling to resolve disputes. Christian counseling or therapy might be the only option or referral offered. Simply too few resources exist to support Christians through the process of biblical conflict resolution. And if they do, Christians don't know where to find them.

This guide is intended to provide an overview of the scriptural basis for our approach to conflict as believers, as well as to provide some practical guidance for the steps you can take to pursue biblical resolution to conflict. If we look to His word and follow His guidance, we can experience peace from conflict, and provide a compelling witness to others of His goodness and love.

Self-Reflection

Romans 3:23 "...for all have sinned..."

Matthew 7:3-5 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Man's fall from grace in the garden of Eden continues to affect our every relationship. We are all sinners, whose hearts have tendencies toward self-serving motivations and selfish pride. The first step in any biblical approach to conflict resolution is necessarily turning our gaze inward, inspecting our emotional responses, checking them against God's Word, repenting of our sin, and preparing our hearts for a humble posture toward our adversary. We cannot expect to experience peace if we haven't first identified our role in the conflict.

If you are feeling anxious about personally addressing conflict with someone, One option is Conflict Coaching, an unique and emerging resource that may be a beneficial. Conflict Coaches provide encouragement, advice, prayer, support and informal instruction in basic peacemaking principles to equip individuals to personally address conflict with another. The process of self-reflection is not intended to identify where blame lies or who is at fault. The purpose is to sufficiently prepare your heart for a personal encounter with conflict that glorifies God.

What sin or heart issue on my part has contributed to the conflict? How might my response to a hurt or offense have intensified the division? In most types of conflict, there is some degree of contribution that we must acknowledge. Our contribution could be an outward offense, such as an angry outburst or conduct that advanced our own interests at another's expense, or it could be a heart condition, such as harboring bitterness or gossiping about the other person. Either way, we must first confront our offenses against others and against God, repent of our sins, and move forward with an attitude of humility and grace if we hope to see reconciliation or experience peace.

Go To Your Brother

Romans 12:18 "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."

Matthew 5:23-24 "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. "

Galatians 6:1 "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."

Oftentimes facing conflict head-on is the last thing we want to do. We'd rather bury our head in the sand, avoid the person who caused us pain, or try to pretend the offense did not occur. Oftentimes we avoid the conflict, or the person entirely, convincing ourselves that in doing so we are maintaining peace. But God calls us to *initiate* the process of reconciliation. If there is conflict in a relationship, "go to your brother". God's call for us is to be a peacemaker, even if we feel we have done nothing wrong or the other person's offense is greater of the two.

This approach is vastly counter-cultural. Our obligation as Christians is to do everything *we* can to restore peace to relationships, regardless of the other person's role in the conflict or posture toward reconciliation. This can be an extremely intimidating proposition. We may feel that we know that the other person wants nothing to do with us. We might fear being confronted in an angry tirade of accusations. Nevertheless, God calls us to "go," not wait for someone else to make the first move.

It's important to keep in mind that the call to "go" is not a call to declare war. It is not an instruction to arm yourself with an arsenal of evidence, excuses, justification, and quick retorts. If we have taken the first step of self-reflection seriously, we should be prepared to humble ourselves, confess our sins before the other party, and request forgiveness. And when confronting and acknowledging sin in another's role in the conflict we should seek to do so graciously, in love, rather than righteous condemnation. Often it is by God's grace alone that we can approach the conflict with love and grace, honoring the other person as created in the image of God, and one of God's beloved children. Pray that God would transform your heart and "go" to your brother with an attitude of love and mercy.

Assisted Peacemaking

1 Corinthians 12:25-27: "That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."

Sometimes two believers need outside help to resolve conflict between them. Emotions can run high and resentment and hurt may have settled in, clouding objectivity. Thankfully, part of the blessing of living in Christian community is that we are surrounded by others whose wise counsel and unbiased hearts can be called on to assist should the need arise.

Your church may have defined processes to assist in the resolution of conflict between members. The degree of involvement may depend on the nature of the conflict. Church discipline

Pastors, small-group leaders, pastoral care staff, or church counselors may also be available within a church body to assist with the resolution of conflict. Check with your church leaders about what kind of resources might be available or what processes they already have in place. If they don't have options in-house, they will likely be able to refer you to someone. Traditional counseling is the most common resource utilized to address conflict in marital relationships, but it is not the only option.

Christian mediation, discussed more fully below, can also be used to reconcile conflict between spouses or in other relationships; it is not only limited to legal disputes.

Regardless of your relationship or the nature of the conflict between two believers, God calls us to pursue peace amongst believers, and we honor God when we make every effort, and utilize a variety of resources in the name of reconciliation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 “When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers,…”

Romans 14:19 “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

Matthew 5:25-26 “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

2 Corinthians 13:11: “Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

When individuals have a dispute they can not resolve between themselves, legal options are often explored and often pursued. Through the litigation process, rights are asserted, demands are made, and in if settlement is not reached, a trial occurs, each party testifying to the wrongs and hurts committed by the other. As a result, the nature of a relationship can devolve from a simple difference of opposing interests to one of pure adversarial contempt for one another.

The legal system in the United States is arguably the most fair and just in the world, but in order to achieve outcomes insulated by Constitutional protections (fair notice of the charges/claims against you, opportunity for a hearing before a Court, burdens of proof, the right to face and cross-examine witnesses who testify against you, etc...), parties to a lawsuit too often become competitors, fighting over access to evidence and witnesses, demanding strict compliance with procedural rules, all with the goal of jockeying for a better position before the Judge or jury. The desired outcome is no longer one that results in a restored relationship (if it ever was), or one that allows the parties to move forward with a different, but peaceful, relationship, but one that satisfies each litigants own goals and demands, at the expense of the other's.

Parties in a lawsuit may yearn for their “day in court,” an opportunity to make their case and present evidence of the other person's wrongs. However, it often, especially in family courts (divorce/custody), there is rarely a “winner.” Court determined outcomes are often lose-lose.

Neither party gets everything they wanted, and they have both paid dearly, in both attorney fees and, perhaps more costly, any hope of restoring a peaceful relationship.

God understood the perils of the secular legal system. He warned of the risks of submitting a dispute between believers to the secular Court. And he called believers to something different. We are held to a different standard in how we live and love others. Why then would we resolve disputes according to a worldly standard? While the secular legal process may be necessary to obtain a full resolution of some kinds of disputes (i.e., divorce), Christians can still obtain resolutions to their conflicts in a way that glorifies God, honors one another, and restores peace.

Through alternative resolution processes, Christians can resolve disputes according to biblical values and principles, even those that implicate legal rights disputes. Mediation and arbitration are the most commonly available forms of alternative dispute resolution that seek to provide resolution to parties in conflict without requiring court intervention.

Mediation

Mediation is a structured form of settlement negotiation, facilitated by a trained third-party neutral, the Mediator. The mediator is specially trained to help the parties engage in communication that is respectful and productive, moving the conversation from “what happened?” to “where do we go from here?” Christian mediation focuses on identifying the heart issues underlying the dispute and providing a forum for gracious restoration of offenses. The mediator can help the parties identify mutually beneficial outcomes to a conflict, or negotiate a settlement to a legal dispute, that is satisfactory to both parties.

The process of Christian mediation endeavors to restore relationships in a manner that glorifies God and honors the other person. If the relationship can not be restored to its previous form, mediation can help the parties define what the new relationship will look like and how they can each move forward in genuine peace.

Arbitration

Sometimes parties to a dispute cannot come to an agreed-upon resolution themselves, even after numerous attempts at peacemaking. As discussed above, God calls believers to resolve disputes between them outside of the secular court. Arbitration is one such an alternative. Arbitration provides a definitive outcome to a dispute, oftentimes with binding, legally enforceable orders.

To proceed with arbitration, both parties must have signed a written agreement to give an arbitrator, a neutral third-party, the authority to decide their dispute for them. The written agreement of the parties will set forth the scope of the issues to be decided and the arbitrator’s procedural requirements of the parties and for the process. Christian Arbitration can occur by agreement of the parties with an arbitrator who will decide their dispute, and according to Christian principles and biblical wisdom.

We honor God when we seek to follow his commands and trust His wisdom through even the most difficult times of conflict. When we strive to reflect God's love, forgiveness, grace, and mercy to those we are in conflict with, we provide a beautiful witness to God's character and glorify Him. Peace is possible if we look to Him.

Mathew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God.

Thank you to [Anderson Allen LLC](#) for sharing this post. Check back on the blog later this week for an interview with the firm's founders for more on how they and lead clients through Biblical-based conflict resolution.

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Laura Bernero is our blog curator, overseeing both internal content and contributions from our amazing network of writers. She loves all things creative communications, acting on the belief that we all resonate with great narrative and connect to one another through story. In addition to her role at DIFW, she manages media storytelling campaigns at [SE2](#), a Denver-based communications agency. She was [5280 Fellow in the inaugural 2016-17 class](#) and can't wait to see the program continue to empower leaders throughout Denver in their unique gifts and callings.

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