

## **BIBLICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

by Matthew McDill  
truthtofreedom.org

Have you had a fight with someone you love this week? Unfortunately, most of us have. It is amazing how we can experience so much joy and so much frustration from one relationship! We can enjoy the fellowship and love and cooperation. But relationships are also difficult. We often do not agree. We hurt or are hurt by others. We act wrongly and this affects those around us.

What should we do when we are hurt or believe those around us are doing the wrong thing? God tells us how to handle it in the Bible. When we follow his ways, we will be able to faithfully love *and* uphold truth and righteousness.

Here are nine steps you can take (and retake) when you face these difficulties in your relationships.

### **1. Give space**

When Dana and I were first married, I asked my older brother Michael to give me marriage advice. He said, "One of the most important lessons I have learned in marriage is that I am not my wife's Holy Spirit (and she isn't mine)."

We like to try to fix those around us. But that is not really our job. In fact, by trying to fix others, we can become an obstacle to their learning process. When I think someone is wrong, I am not going to try to take God's place in his or her life.

There is another reason we should not dive right into a "discussion" when we disagree. Some of us tend to speak before we think. Anger and frustration make this even worse. James advises, "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19).

So, the first thing I am going to do when I think someone else is wrong about something is nothing. With humility and patience, I am going to give the other person space to make mistakes and learn from them.

"But I can't do nothing! This is too important!" Don't forget, this is only the first step.

The second step provides another great reason we should not dive right into correcting others.

### **2. Check yourself**

Jesus warned, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matt 7:3-5)

Go ahead and say this out loud to yourself: "I might be wrong." Some of us really need to add this possibility to our thinking process. When I am in conflict and I choose to give space and check myself, I find that often the main problem is actually me! I get alone with God and ask him to convict me and help me understand the situation. He will.

It may be that there is still a legitimate issue in the other's life. But this is a great opportunity to make sure that I have discerned, confessed, and requested forgiveness for any wrongdoing on my part. Getting things right from my end often clears up the waters for others to see their own issues. It also strengthens the relationship and clears the way to address those issues when the time is right.

Bottom line: do not "go to your brother" about their sin when there is unconfessed sin on your part in the relationship.

### **3. Let go of anger**

When we are hurt by others, or think that what they are doing is wrong, we often become angry. Trying to have a discussion when we are angry will rarely produce good results. Paul warns us not to allow anger to settle in our hearts (Eph 4:26-27).

Forgiveness takes place at two levels. One is the relational level, when we extend forgiveness to a repentant person and the relationship is restored. Another is the heart level. Even if someone does not repent, we must not be resentful or hold on to anger. We can forgive them in our hearts even if the relationship has not yet been restored. This heart level forgiveness is how we let go of anger. We *can* and *must* forgive because we have been forgiven (Matt 18:21-35).

Bottom line: do not "to your brother" about their sin when there is anger and forgiveness in your heart toward them. This sin on your part is a direct obstacle to your relationship with God (Matt 6:14-15).

### **4. Love**

When something goes wrong, our natural response is to withdrawal. This is usually an attempt to protect ourselves or to influence the other person by expressing our disapproval of them. This is not love. Love is what is best for someone else, even when it costs me. Love does not choose its course of action based on personal hurt and loss (Christ is our example).

Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Even when we are hurt and our relationships are broken, we can love. The entire purpose of your life and all the commandment of God are fulfilled in this one act of obedience (Mark 12:30; Gal 5:14).

Love (along with the other steps) is why 100% of your fights will cease. Love is patient and kind . . . (1 Cor 13:4-7). And if 80% of our conflicts are because we focused on ourselves, then love destroys them. We stop focusing on what we need and want and focus on others.

Here is the challenge: go do something to express your love for the person you are in conflict with. Do it before things are resolved. Do it today. This will solidify your forgiveness toward them and will strengthen your relational foundation so you can deal with difficult subjects at the right time.

### **5. Pray**

Do we really think we will be able change others? What do they need? Who can change them?

Jesus can.

So talk to him about the situation. Pray for the work of the Spirit to convict them if you believe they are wrong about something. Pray about how and when to bring up the matter with them. Allow God to lead you in handling the situation. He might tell you to let him handle this one and be patient.

(Matt 5:44; James 1:5-8)

## 6. **Talk**

At this point in the 9 Steps, I finally get to do what I've been chomping at the bit to do since the problem first began: *talk*. Hopefully taking the other steps first (which you can read about here) has prevented me from making some major mistakes. If I have made it this far in the process, and still believe that there is a legitimate issue that needs to be resolved, then it is time to talk. But how I approach this is critical.

First, *ask questions*. I should not come into the conversation with guns a' blazing, firing off my accusations. Here is a wise saying,

"If one gives an answer before he hears,  
it is his folly and shame."

(Prov 18:13)

Bring up the topic by asking for more information about what happened, how the other person feels about it, or what motivated the situation. *Listen* to what they say.

Second, *be gentle and kind*. Even if we are asking questions, we are probably poking into a sensitive area. Another wise word,

"A soft answer turns away wrath,  
but a harsh word stirs up anger."

(Prov 15:1)

This open and gentle approach often gives the other person space to fess up to their own mistakes without having to confront them.

## 7. **Discern**

Now that you have more information, the next task in the conversation is to discern what kind of issue you are facing. I will suggest two basic categories:

- a) those of a secondary nature, involving personal conviction or preference
- b) those involving violation of central biblical principles

Paul warns the Romans "not to quarrel over opinions" (14:1). On these secondary issues, "each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (14:12).

Not that I can't discuss questions of opinion or the best way to get something done. But I will do so with humility and patience. And ultimately, I will be willing to let it go and let the other person live according to his or her own conviction.

By going through these steps, you may discover that many of your problems are not legitimate issues. However, if we make it to this point, then it is necessary to take step 8.

## **8. Speak the truth**

Jesus has given us the responsibility of going to our brother in the Lord and confronting him for his sin (Matt 18:15). This is for their good, so they can repent and avoid the harm that comes from sin (James 1:15). How we handle this is important. Paul explains that we are to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) and "restore him in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal 6:1).

There is much more to discuss here. What if they won't listen? What about the other steps in Matt 18? How long should this process take? For now the point is to accept the responsibility and have the courage to take this important step to lovingly and gently speak the truth.

## **9. Give space**

Now we are back to the first step. Once you have spoken truth to them, give them time to process it. Unless you sense they are ready to immediately repent, you might want to end the conversation with this question, "Will you please pray about and consider what I have said?"

### **How long does it take to go through all these steps?**

Of course, there is no set amount of time these steps will require. You must walk through this depending on the Lord for wisdom and leadership. You should be willing for it to take much longer than you want it to. At the same time, do not assume that it must take a long time since there are so many steps. Many of these steps are basic issues of Christian maturity. It is possible that you have incorporated these behaviors into your everyday living and that you are able to process a conflict almost immediately.

*If you would like to provide feedback or ask further questions about this article, please email Matthew at [matthew@truthtofreedom.org](mailto:matthew@truthtofreedom.org).*