

Let there be no Strife between Me and Thee

(Conflict in Relationships)

By Al Felder

"And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." (Genesis 13:8)

It is a blessing when there is peace and harmony in the relationships that we have in our life. However, no matter how close the relationship may be, conflicts will arise. Conflicts often occur between husbands and wives; parents and children; and members of the body of Christ. The important question for us as followers of Christ is how we handle conflicts when they disrupt our relationships. Thankfully, God has left us a pattern within His word on how to deal with conflict in our relationships, and it is our goal to discuss it at this time.

In the beginning, conflict did not exist in human relationships. God created both man and woman upon the sixth day of creation and for a time their relationship with one another was as God intended it to be. There was no strife, discord, jealousy, envy, or hatred because there was no sin. Each person acted towards one another with love. Something happened, however, that affected this relationship, and all other relationships. Sin entered into God's creation.

When the first man and woman chose to disobey God, the first sin was committed. This sin had an immediate impact upon their relationship with one another. When God entered into the garden and enquired about what had happened, the man's response shows us the effects of sin on his relationship with his wife. *"And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."* (Genesis 3:12) Already, Adam has changed from the loving husband he once was to someone who is willing to point the finger and pass the blame on to someone else.

Not very long after this event, we read of another conflict between two individuals. This time it is Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. *"And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."* (Genesis 4:8) Once again we find the effects of sin on a relationship. Two brothers became enemies because of sin. Cain became jealous of his brother, and he allowed that jealousy to grow into hatred which led to murder.

Conflicts have brought untold harm unto relationships. The word conflict is a military term that means to fight against. A conflict, therefore, occurs when two individuals allow themselves to be at odds with one another. As we have already seen within the Bible, this occurs within families and it can occur between two members of the body of Christ as well.

No greater harm can be done to the cause of Christ than for conflict to destroy relationships. Regardless of whether a conflict is between two family members or between two

members of the body of Christ, great harm can be caused to the Church. In fact, nothing can drain the Church of her strength more than unresolved conflicts. When two people are at odds with one another it usually does not stop there. It is only a matter of time before others are drawn in, and the division grows.

When conflicts become a problem among God's people the body becomes disorganized. It is like an army that has been overcome by the enemy and in the confusion turns on one another and begins fighting amongst themselves. Brother killing brother. What a sad state for the Lord's Church to exist. Instead of carrying forth the Gospel to the lost, the body is at war with itself. What can be done to prevent this from happening?

One of the first things that we must do is realize how conflicts originate. We have already stated that sin is the cause of conflicts, but we want to be more specific in regards to the issue. *"From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"* *"Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."* *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."* (James 4:1-3) The Bible tells us very clearly how we can have conflicts amongst ourselves. Conflicts arise when we put what we want first.

Imagine if you will, two individuals at odds with one another. Each person is focused only on his or her needs. It is an attitude that expresses itself through such language as my way, my feelings, my rights, and my needs. Each person sets up his or her own military encampment and starts the campaign to get what they so desperately want. It is a display of pride and fleshly desires.

At this point I believe that we should make it very clear as to exactly what we are talking about. We are not talking about false doctrine or false teachers. We are talking about conflict between two people. This conflict may come about as the result of differences in personality or selfishness.

As we begin to think about these causes of conflict, there is something that we must realize. Two individuals having different personalities is not a sin. We can, however, sin when we act in an inappropriate way towards someone else because of those personality differences. Selfishness is sin because we go against the commands of God by focusing on ourselves instead of others. This is a major downfall of our society today. We are constantly told to think about ourselves, or to put ourselves first. No such language exists within the word of God. Instead we are to put others first.

When a conflict arises it must be dealt with quickly. *"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."* (Matthew 6:34) Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow. Our concern should be upon today. Today's problems need to be handled today. The same could also be said

about the past. We do not need to carry around a load of problems. If we carry around a lifetime of unresolved problems we will not be effective in serving Christ.

This thought is carried out even further in other passages of scripture. Christ gives us instructions on how to handle these situations, and we find that they call for immediate action. “²³*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*” (Matthew 5:23, 24) As soon as we realize that someone has something against us, we should seek to be reconciled right away. Do not let time pass and cause the issue to grow.

It takes a lot for a person to take this step, and it requires something very important. “³*And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? ⁴Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? ⁵Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.*” (Matthew 7:3-5) We must be honest and willing to take a long hard look at ourselves. Many conflicts fail to be resolved because both individuals are busy pointing their fingers at each other. You will never get anywhere that way, when two people square off against one another the communication stops.

Instead of attacking one another, we need to take a hard long look at ourselves. Look at yourself and see if you have done something to offend the other person. If you find that you have done something, ask for forgiveness. Don’t be too proud to seek to be reconciled with someone.

There is another side to the equation as well. “*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*” (Matthew 18:15) Now we deal with the person who is offended. If you believe that you have been wronged by someone go to that person. It’s as simple as that.

Unfortunately, this is not how we often handle problems. “¹⁴*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. ¹⁶For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*” (James 3:14-16) On many occasions we go and tell others how we have been offended. We don’t go to the person who offended us; we make sure and tell everyone else. We allow bitterness, envy, and strife to build in our hearts. We didn’t go to the person immediately, and, as a result, the offence has grown. This is not God’s way.

God doesn’t allow us to sit around, and wait for our brother to come to us. According to scripture, if two Christians have a conflict they both have an obligation; they should each start walking to the others house and meet each other in the middle. Once you put the two pieces of the puzzle together you find a beautiful picture of reconciliation.

There are some things that we need to do in order to be able to handle conflicts. “*And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*” (Romans 12:2) We must be transformed by the word of God. As we read and study the word of God, we change our way of looking at things. Instead of having a worldly mindset we will begin to develop a godly mindset. We will deal with problems in a way that is pleasing to God.

As we pointed out at the beginning of our lesson, it takes two people to have a conflict. In many instances we give a wrong response to someone. “*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*” (Proverbs 15:1) Think of the relationship between a husband and his wife for just a second. There are often times in which one of the spouses may be a little sharp with their speech. It may be because something is bothering them, they may be tired, or they may feel like they have been wronged. Well, we can bristle up and decide to give as good as we get. We make our speech just as sharp as theirs, and before you know it we have a full blown conflict.

Just imagine what the result would have been had we heeded the words of scripture. Instead of trading blow for blow, give a soft answer. On many occasions we can completely defuse a situation by the way we respond. We can be kind and gracious, thus, preventing the situation from escalating.

Also, we must prefer one another. “*Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.*” (1 Corinthians 10:24) It is hard to wear our feelings on our shoulder when we are seeking what's best for each other. As I said before, the greatest downfall of our society is the focus on self. God's word teaches the opposite. We should seek to do good to others. If we prefer one another it doesn't leave much room for offences.

Finally, we should pray for one another. “*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*” (James 5:16) Have you ever prayed for someone who had wronged you? You know it's hard to stay mad at someone for whom you are praying. Pray for one another. It will lead to peace in the body of Christ.

In conclusion, we as God's people must learn to live without bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice for such things lead to conflict. We must work on maintaining a good attitude towards one another. “*Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*” (Colossians 3:13) We were unlovely and ungodly. Yet, Christ sought our good despite our wickedness. He set the ultimate example of putting others first.