



# Life Principles Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God

## CONFRONTING CONFLICT

**KEY PASSAGE:** Galatians 2:11-16 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 141:3 | Luke 12:12; 23:34 | Acts 15:9  
Ephesians 4:30-32 | 1 Peter 2:9-10

### SUMMARY:

#### **Conflict is an inevitable part of life.**

We face disagreements in marriage, with our family, between friends, at the workplace, and in the community. Trying to avoid all conflict is futile. Disagreement is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. That's why our goal should be to respond correctly to conflict. If we choose to react in humility and forgiveness, you and I can avoid becoming bitter and resentful toward others and the Lord. God can use conflict to improve our relationships, teach us about ourselves, and mature us spiritually. Let's take a look at what the Bible teaches about how believers should respond to criticism and other types of interpersonal conflict.

### SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES:

#### **Conflict affected the first Christians.**

The leadership of the early church debated whether or not Gentiles had to follow the Jewish traditions, such as circumcision, in order to be saved. Peter argued that God "made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Later, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles by refusing to eat with them. He acted as if they were still unclean in God's eyes.

Paul publically confronted Peter's hypocrisy: "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how it is that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? . . . [We know] that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but through

faith in Jesus Christ . . . since by the works of the law no flesh will be justified" (Gal. 2:14, 16). Peter responded wisely. He apparently didn't try to justify himself. Instead, he humbly admitted his error and changed. First Peter 2:9-10 reveals his conviction that through faith in Christ, Gentiles could now be called "the people of God" and be on equal footing with Jewish believers.

#### **How can we confront conflict?**

■ **Recognize the cause.** People disagree with each other for a number of reasons. Conflict may result from different opinions, a personality clash, miscommunication, or jealousy. It can arise from misplaced frustration. A person may be angry with someone else—or even with God—but they take it out on you. Other arguments occur because people rebel against authority. And certain conflicts have their roots in emotional baggage from a person's childhood or previous relationships.

■ **Consider the effect of conflict.** There are at least two wrong ways to respond to disagreement. First, some try to suppress the conflict—they recognize a problem but decide to do nothing about it. This is one of the worst approaches, especially within a marriage. Secondly, people may repress it. In other words, they deny that the conflict even exists. Then, when the relationship falls apart, those involved try to pretend they had no idea anything was wrong.

When conflict is not dealt with properly, it affects most areas of our lives. Unresolved disagreement divides our minds, contributes to health problems, and hinders our emotions.

It causes unnecessary pain and disappointments. I believe if you are holding on to anger towards another person, you can't truly love anyone. Conflict, especially if we are unforgiving, also blocks our fellowship with God. The Father uses strife to teach us about ourselves. So if you or I refuse to address it, we delay our personal growth.

■ **How can we respond wisely to conflict?**

1) *Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment.* Since disagreements have various causes, begin with seeking God to learn the source in each situation. Is the person jealous of you? Is he or she really angry about another issue or upset with someone else? Did the individual have a difficult day and take his or her stress out on you? Was the offense intentional or accidental? Answers to these questions will help you determine how to respond.

2) *Maintain a quiet spirit.* Our natural reaction is to defend ourselves when we are attacked. But often, the best response is silence. Let the other person talk, and sometimes, he or she will reveal the root of the conflict.

3) *At first, make no attempt to defend yourself.* When people are furious, they can't listen to your perspective. If God leads you to explain yourself, wait until the other person finishes. He or she will be more likely to hear your side.

4) *Ask the Holy Spirit to guard your mouth.* Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." Whether you are facing one person or a crowd of accusers, don't blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Carefully consider what you are going to say, and leave time for God to provide you with wise answers (Luke 12:12).

5) *View the conflict as coming from God.* It doesn't originate with the Lord, but He desires to use everything for good in our lives. When I learned to view conflict as something the Father allows, it freed me to view those situations objectively. This perspective protected me from becoming bitter with God or critical, resentful, and angry at others.

6) *Ask the Holy Spirit if you are at fault.* If you see that you were wrong, immediately apologize and ask for forgiveness. When you feel unjustly

condemned, learn to say, "I appreciate that you felt free to tell me this. I will prayerfully evaluate your criticism, and I will ask God to show me if or where I've been wrong. Do you have any other suggestion that would help me?" Humility is always the right approach to criticism.

7) *Forgive the one responsible for the conflict.* Even if their analysis was totally wrong, forgive them for bringing strife into your life. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Jesus provided the perfect example of this. While being unjustly crucified, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

8) *Ask God to reveal His purpose for allowing the conflict.* You may not know immediately why the Lord is allowing difficulty. But, in time, you will be able to look back and see what He accomplished through each situation you faced. Pain, suffering, and heartache mature us spiritually and equip us to help others more effectively.

## CONCLUSION:

Conflict may be inevitable, but you and I can choose how to respond to it. When you are unable to come to an agreement with another person, don't feel like a spiritual failure. No one can force another person to reconcile. When you are unable to solve a particular conflict, determine to walk in forgiveness anyway. Refuse to harbor anger against that individual. In my experience, nonbelievers often have a change of heart—and sometimes even become saved—when a Christian responds in a godly fashion. Ask God for wisdom, and He will be faithful to guide your steps. The Father desires that our response to conflict be a powerful demonstration of His power and grace to a hurting world. ✨



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