

# How to Handle Your Relational Conflicts Biblically and Redemptively

With opposition to biblical values increasing, we must determine not to be divided by those who “sow discord among the brethren,” one of six things “the Lord hates” (Prov. 6:19).

It’s difficult but essential. Consider how our Chinese brethren in the underground church prepare by pledging how they will deal with anti-Christian hostility:

*When you reject me, you honor me for you associate me with Christ.*

*When you arrest me, you free me to obey a higher law.*

*When you exclude me, you endorse me as a friend of the King of kings.*

*When you imprison me, you free me to share the gospel openly.*

*When you put me in solitary confinement, you allow me to pray and meditate on Scripture.*

*When you beat me, you allow me to glorify God.*

*When you seize my home or farm, you allow me to travel widely to spread the gospel.*

*When you kill me, you send me to glory.*

To prepare ourselves for challenging times ahead, it’s critical that Christians understand how God directs us to handle inevitable relational problems. Over the decades, multitudes have embraced the “Peacemakers Pledge” to maintain

unity by biblical conflict resolution.

Before sharing it, consider some practical points:

### **3 Insights on Conflict**

**1. Conflict is normal and inevitable.** Life is not about the absence of conflict, but it's about overcoming it redemptively. If we don't, relationships fracture at home, church, office, school, neighborhood and beyond. In 43 years, my wife and I have had innumerable "intense fellowship" times that I thank God He steered us through by applying His wisdom.

Jesus told us relational conflict would intensify prior to His return. Many would be offended, "fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another" (Matt. 24:10).

Three primary reasons for relational breakdown are:

1. Having unspoken and unmet expectations.
2. Misjudging people (jumping to conclusions rather than believing the best).
3. Failing to communicate personally and promptly—people get divorced, individuals lose jobs, reputations are destroyed, churches split and longstanding friendships fall apart because of these.

One global hotel chain won't allow Coca-Cola in their establishments because of a personal rift decades ago.

Apple nurtures a healthy culture by requiring that employees to go to individuals one-on-one when they have relational problems.

My pastor and I go to each other whenever there's a misunderstanding. Returning from his recent vacation, he called to understandably inquire why I didn't contact him with church updates. I incorrectly assumed he'd like to be alone so I apologized, thanked him and agreed we're all the better for the future.

We are imperfect people. Scripture says "We all err in many ways" (James 3:2). Once we learn God's way to respond to relational conflict, it requires a quality decision to be intentional and obedient. Yielding to emotional withdrawal causes relational breakdown as the "accuser of the brethren" fosters distancing and division.

**2. Conflict provides opportunity for growth.** I believe the primary mistake Christians make is relegating to the realm of emotion that which belongs to the realm of decision. *Agape* love is not a feeling but an unselfish choice; forgiveness is not an elective but a directive; obedience is not optional but volitional.

A man told me he was divorcing his wife because he "didn't love her anymore." I listened to his story then shared that the Bible repeatedly commands husbands to "love their wives" (Eph. 5:22-33). He protested that the marriage was obviously "broken" and "he *felt* [emphasis mine] he just didn't love her anymore."

I added the Bible also commands us "love your neighbor" (Mark 12:31) explaining that his wife was his closest neighbor. He said "I can't."

I grinned at my brother and told him the Bible also commands us "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). He had no response.

My friend was selfishly resisting God's call for him to stop playing the "blame game" and unselfishly care for the woman whom he vowed to love "till death do us part." Time to grow up!

**3. Most conflict is not dealt with properly because people haven't been taught how.** If people don't follow God's design for dealing with conflict in relationship then they try foolish and futile ways: Avoid the problem and hope it goes away (it won't); pretend it didn't happen (it did); try to be extra nice (cover it till it resurfaces); hope folks forget

(they won't) and, worst of all, engage in ad hominem (discredit the person) attacks to destroy credibility and reputation.

## **Politics of Poison**

Over the decades we've watched a political party regularly handle conflict on nominations and politicians by character assassination. Their playbook consists of making uncorroborated accusations, disregarding due process ("innocent until proven guilty"), rushing to judgment and manipulating masses by the leftist-leaning media.

Do you remember the destructive assault on Robert Bork by Ted Kennedy, Clarence Thomas being demonized by Anita Hill or Brett Kavanaugh being assailed by Christine Blasey Ford's unsubstantiated accusations? Do we dare mention the political operative "whistleblower" working in secret with Trump-haters who have stated since his inauguration their plan to impeach a duly-elected president?

We should be shocked, sobered and severely grieved seeing the devastation and destruction of patriots, their families and the very fabric of our nation. We're disregarding God's Word by dismissing integrity, civility and propriety in handling conflict.

## **What's at Stake?**

For the United States of America: We are living in the most acrimonious time since the Civil War. We are in a battle for the soul of our nation as diabolical forces are at work to divide us, dismantle our Judeo-Christian foundations and destroy America as a democratic republic.

At the end of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Ben Franklin was asked what kind of government America would have when he left Independence Hall in Philadelphia. He replied,

“It’s a republic, if we can keep it.”

We are currently involved in a constitutional crisis. For our future and our families we must consecrate ourselves to restoring our heritage established upon biblical principles that made us the most blessed nation on earth.

For the church of Jesus Christ: We cannot afford the luxury of easily broken relationships and divisive conduct anymore. Jesus prayed before going to Calvary that we’d maintain unity: “May they also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21). The late John Stott challenged us that if the world doesn’t see relational unity in the witness of Christians, Jesus gave them the option of legitimately questioning if He truly came from God!

Whenever we’re tempted to ignore divine directives for resolving relational conflict, refuse to be a cupcake or a coward (“I’m done ’cause he hurt my feelings” ... “She offended me” ... “They ignored me” ... “I wasn’t invited” ... “My faith in God is crushed.”). Instead, proactively proceed to get with the person, remembering it’s far better to sacrifice short-term discomfort to enjoy long-term peace.

Jesus told us, “Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go on your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). He also said, “Now 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” (Matt. 18:15). We must be resolute in our obedience to work at making things right “lest any root of bitterness spring up to cause trouble, and many become defiled by it” (Heb. 12:15).

### **The Peacemaker’s Pledge**

To help you, I encourage you to download the outstanding

resource “The Peacemaker’s Pledge” by Ken Sande, whose classic book *The Peacemaker* has sold over 1/2 million copies in 70 countries.

Commit yourself to this, as our Chinese brethren have, so you are prepared for opposition. Learn the biblical basics. Share it with your family and your church community.

Here’s the deal: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Let’s do our part by pledging to handle relational conflicts God’s way “while you are waiting for and desiring the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12).