

# CONFLICT

## HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Matthew 5:23-24  
Matthew 18:25



# How to Resolve Conflicts

## Course Overview

It seems that people often have trouble getting along together. Families argue, neighbors come to blows, countries unleash weapons at each other. Is this the way it has to be?

Anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and others say it is. Having observed a long history of Man's quarrelsome behavior, they claim that Man has animal instincts, or that he is anti-social and violent by his very nature.

In truth, Man is rather peaceful. But he can be driven, individually and collectively, to hatred and violence.

In researching the causes of violence, we have unearthed fundamental Christian Principles and natural law of human relations which explains why conflicts between people are so often difficult to remedy. And the Church can provide an immensely valuable tool that enables one to resolve any conflict, be it between neighbors, co-workers or even countries.

In this course, you will discover how to help others resolve their differences and restore peaceable relations. Peace and harmony between people can be more than just a dream. Widespread application of Biblical law will make it a reality.

## Conflict Coaching

### Overview

When someone asks for your help in resolving a conflict, you can often do a great deal of good without getting directly involved in the dispute. Instead, you can simply offer counsel on how that individual might be able to go back to the other person and resolve their differences in private.

In doing so, you are helping the individual to obey Jesus' instructions in [Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15](#), "If you ... remember that your brother has something against you ..., go and be reconciled," and "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."

This process of offering individual counsel is sometimes referred to as "coaching," because the conciliator is offering encouragement and advice from the sidelines instead of getting directly involved with both parties in the dispute.

An effective coach will listen carefully and promote personal responsibility while guiding individuals through the basic steps of peacemaking, which we call the "Four G's": "Glorify God, Get the log out of your eye, Gently restore, and Go and be reconciled. (These principles are described only briefly here; for a more detailed discussion, please see *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*.)

## **Keep People on Top of the Slippery Slope**

When people are faced with conflict, it is natural to try to escape from the situation or to attack the other party. Escape responses only postpone a proper solution to a problem, and attack responses usually damage relationships and make conflicts worse. Therefore, you should generally guide people away from these responses and encourage them to respond to deal with conflict in private by using a conciliation response (overlooking an offense, discussion, or negotiation).

If repeated efforts at personal peacemaking do not resolve a dispute, you may need to help the person implement one of the other conciliation responses (mediation, arbitration, or church discipline), which will require the assistance of other people in your church or community.

## **Show How Conflict Is an Opportunity**

A person's attitude powerfully affects the way he or she responds to conflict. Therefore, it is important to help people see that conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and

causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good (see Rom. 8:28-29). In particular, as the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, we can use conflict to:

- Glorify God (by trusting, obeying, and imitating him)
- Serve other people (by helping them to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love)
- Grow to be like Christ (by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict).

Since most people are preoccupied with avoiding or winning a conflict, these three opportunities are totally overlooked in most situations, even by Christians. Therefore, a coach should continually encourage people to realign their goals and behavior to maximize these opportunities.

## **Listen Carefully and Dig for Information**

The greatest drawback to conflict coaching is that you are getting only one side of the story. Therefore, you should pay special attention to **Proverbs 18:13 and 17**: "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame .... The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward to question him."

Instead of jumping to conclusions and offering hasty advice, give people time to fully explain their situation. Then ask careful questions to fill in the gaps in their story and learn how they may have contributed to the conflict through their own attitudes, words, or actions. Only after you have understood as much of the situation as possible should you begin to suggest ways that people can pursue peace, and even then you should resist drawing any final conclusions about people with whom you have not talked.

Throughout this data-gathering process, be careful not to encourage sinful gossip or slander. If someone starts to talk about details that are not needed to understand the problem and plan a solution, move them on to more appropriate matters. If they speak about others in a judgmental or condemning way, gently admonish them and help them

to speak in a way that honors God (see [Prov. 12:18](#); [2 Tim. 2:16](#); [Eph. 4:29](#)).

## **Promote Personal Responsibility**

A good coach doesn't run the plays for the players. Your job is to provide wise counsel and develop sound plans, but then you need to stand back and let the person you are advising put the plan into action.

This role distinction is especially important in peacemaking, because people in conflict are often looking for someone to solve their problems for them. If you give in to that desire you will usually end up with superficial, temporary solutions, and you will deprive others of the learning and maturing that God has in store for them.

Therefore, while you should certainly do what is necessary to help people deal with matters that are truly beyond their abilities, you should be careful not to take over their responsibilities. One way to help people take ownership for the solution of their problems is to give them specific homework assignments. You can ask them to read and apply relevant portions of Scripture. For example, an unforgiving person could study and meditate on [Matthew 18:20-35](#) and [Ephesians 4:30-32](#); a harsh employer could do the same with [Matthew 7:12](#), [Ephesians 6:9](#), and [Colossians 4:1](#); and a disrespectful employee could read and apply [Ephesians 6:5-8](#), [Colossians 3:22-25](#), [1 Timothy 6:1](#), and [Titus 2:9-10](#).

By requiring people to study and apply God's Word for themselves, you will increase the likelihood of their finding solid solutions to a conflict. More importantly, you will help them to develop insights and skills that will enable them to deal with future conflicts with less outside help from others.

## **Provide Hope and Encouragement**

By the time people turn to someone else for help with a conflict, many of them are already feeling discouraged about resolving the situation, either because of their opponent's stubborn behavior or because of all the mistakes they themselves have made. You must deliberately

counteract this pessimism. Like a coach whose team is trailing at half-time, your job is to rekindle hope and motivate them to play even harder. In biblical terms, you need to "warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, [and] be patient with everyone" (1 Thess. 5:14-15).

When we lose hope of redeeming a particular situation, one simple observation may help, just remember, "For a Christian, it's never too late to start doing what's right." Such a statement helps us to recall that we serve a redeeming God who has forgiven all of our sins. He delights in turning ashes into beauty and is always willing to help his children change their ways. That realization motivates us to keep working at the situation, being confident that even if our opponent did not change, by God's grace we could.

## **Guide People Through the Four G's of Peacemaking**

There are four basic principles that people need to apply in order to respond to conflict biblically, which are:

- Glorify God
- Get the log out of your own eye
- Gently Restore
- Go and be reconciled