

CONFLICT

under
Control

CONFLICT

under
Control

JEFF NEWMAN

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS
1300 North Meacham Road
Schaumburg, Illinois 60173-4806

CONFLICT UNDER CONTROL

© 2007

Regular Baptist Press • Schaumburg, Illinois

www.regularbaptistpress.org • 1-800-727-4440

Printed in U.S.A.

All rights reserved

RBP5363 • ISBN: 978-1-59402-652-2

CONTENTS

	Preface	7
<i>Lesson 1</i>	What Is the Goal of Conflict?.....	9
<i>Lesson 2</i>	Who Is God?	19
<i>Lesson 3</i>	Who Are Other People?	29
<i>Lesson 4</i>	What Do I Think?	39
<i>Lesson 5</i>	How Do I Respond?	49
<i>Lesson 6</i>	What Must I Do?	57
<i>Lesson 7</i>	Who Are My Examples?	67
	Afterword	75
	Answers	77

PREFACE

As a result of sin's entrance into the world, we live on a broken planet. We live around and with fallen, broken people, and we ourselves are fallen and broken. Although Christ has removed the enslaving hold of sin in our lives, the sin in us—with its disposition against God—still remains our greatest enemy and source of conflict.

None of us can avoid the presence of conflicts in our lives:

Brothers and sisters fight over toys.

Teenagers argue with their parents over curfew.

Husbands and wives disagree about how to use the family finances.

Employees complain about their bosses.

Employers complain about their employees.

A church member misinterprets another's actions.

Political parties fight for control of government.

The Bible describes our world of conflict with great precision, because the God of the Bible knows His creation. Yet the Scriptures go beyond an accurate description of conflict to provide rich answers to people in the midst of the conflicts. These answers do not come to us in the form of a checklist for conflict resolution. They do not come as a mere skill set that we need to develop to get along better with people.

No, these answers come in the form of a Person—the Lord Jesus Christ. This is good news—the best news. Why? Because what is wrong with us goes deeper than problems that can be solved with mere skills. What is wrong with us goes to the very heart of who we are, and Christ is the only One Who can, by His Spirit, produce the change of heart we need to live for His glory.

Paul clearly saw this truth in his own life and in the lives of those around him. For example, in Philippians 4:1–10 Paul disclosed a

conflict between Euodias and Syntyche and urged the women to have the same mind in the Lord. He also called on the church members to help Euodias and Syntyche resolve their differences. The inspired words of Scripture to this church will help us to depend on Christ when we face the conflicts of life in this fallen world. The wisdom of Scripture applied to our lives will cause us to rejoice in the God Who understands and changes us.



LESSON 1

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF CONFLICT?

Imagine the scene.

The news has spread among the believers in the city of Philippi: “Epaphroditus, our pastor, has returned. He brought a letter from Paul!”

The Letter Is Read

The believers have gathered together, and the letter is being read aloud. Sounds of rejoicing fill the room when the believers hear, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Philippians 1:3, 4).

Paul’s report of the spread of the gospel even while he was imprisoned encourages the Philippians’ hearts.

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things

which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (Philippians 1:12–14).

A few words later, the Philippians' thoughts turn to their walk with God—rejoicing in His work in their lives and sorrowing over their failures to live out the life of Christ—as they hear:

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:4–8).

They smile with anticipation as they hear of Paul's intentions to send Timothy, their brother in Christ, for a visit. Those who know him can already see his face and hear his voice. Others look forward to meeting this man of God who engendered such love among their friends in the assembly (Philippians 2:19–22).

1. Read Philippians 2:25–30.

a. How might you have felt as you read these words about your faithful pastor, Epaphroditus, who had recently returned from his long visit with Paul?

b. What would you have said to your pastor after reading these words?

As you view the scene of the Philippians reading their letter from Paul, you might see a tear or two fall from the eyes of many as they hear about their pastor's illness and his dedication to Paul and to God. Some are inwardly embarrassed that they have questioned their pastor's loyalty to them during his long absence. The facial expressions and words spoken quietly to Epaphroditus in that moment bring joy to the congregation (Philippians 2:25–30).

As the reading continues, the room falls silent. Everyone is contemplating Paul's intense words of warning: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision" (Philippians 3:2).

Some are uneasy with Paul's words. "Are these people really as bad as Paul is saying?" they whisper. Others nod their heads knowingly as the alarming words are read. "This part of the letter warrants further study and meditation," they remark. They know that Paul's words are calling them to personal watchfulness and change for God's glory and the benefit of their unity.

2. Read Philippians 4:1–13.

a. What additional responses would you have seen and heard in the room as these verses were read?

b. How would you have felt?

Through his letter, Paul has brought into the open the quarrel everyone knows about, but that has gone unresolved for so long. Paul has called on the church to get involved and help Euodias and Syntyche resolve their disagreement—to become of the same mind in the Lord. Maybe it seemed as if ignoring the conflict has worked,

as their outward conflict quieted down. Maybe everyone has given up trying because the effort doesn't seem worth the frustration. For whatever reason, Paul, under the direction of the Spirit of God, has brought the need to resolve this conflict back to the forefront of everyone's mind.

3. What reasons, other than those already mentioned, do people give for failing to deal with conflict?

As the remainder of Paul's letter is read, some of the Philippians barely hear his words of thanks for the financial gift they sacrificed to collect and send with Epaphroditus. Even the greetings sent from believers in the household of the Roman emperor Caesar seem to register only briefly in the thoughts of some in the assembly (Philippians 4:10–23). Many of them likely have their thoughts captured with Euodias and Syntyche and all of the what-ifs of the task before them. “How can we encourage these two women to be of the same mind in the Lord?”

Christ Is the Answer to Conflict

From our earliest days on this earth, we have contributed to and experienced conflict. Remember: conflict is inevitable as we fallen, broken people live in a fallen, broken world, surrounded by other fallen, broken people. Maybe you are in the midst of a conflict now. Are you involved in a disagreement with another person? Have you been called on to assist others in resolving a conflict? From the very beginning of his letter, Paul drew the attention of the Philippians to the only Person Who could move Euodias and Syntyche toward restoration—the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Read Philippians 2:1–4. Record the first command that Paul gave to his readers in these verses.

Paul called on his readers to bring completeness to his joy. In their union with Christ, God's children find encouragement. In Christ's love, God's children find comfort. On the basis of His indwelling Spirit, God's children share fellowship. In Christ, God's children find tenderness and compassionate mercy.

5. Reread Philippians 2:3 and 4. In what ways could the Philippians bring completeness to Paul's joy?

Paul's words to the Philippians call us to give ourselves to the work of unity. If unity is to be achieved, we must have some foundational commitments. Likewise, if the Philippians were to encourage Euodias and Syntyche to have the mind of Christ, they themselves needed to strive to become like-minded. They needed to commit themselves to a self-sacrificing, others-focused love. They needed to dedicate themselves to becoming one in affection and one in thought. They needed to refuse self-promotion, but rather to humble themselves.

6. Consider a recent conflict that you have experienced. How did you demonstrate the commitments discussed above in the midst of the conflict?

7. Where did you fail to demonstrate these commitments? Be thoughtful and specific.

Where you have failed, confess that sin to God, rejoice in God's forgiveness, and commit yourself to new obedience.

8. Read Philippians 2:5.

a. What command must be followed if conflicts are to be faced in a godly manner?

b. Compare this command to Paul's words in Philippians 4:2. What goal did Paul hold out for Euodias and Syntyche?

Conflicts Provide Opportunities to Become like Christ

Paul called on the Philippians to involve themselves in the conflict between Euodias and Syntyche because of the person and work of Christ. He knew that Euodias and Syntyche could restore their relationship with each other because Christ had already restored their relationship with God. Paul knew that all of the members of the church would grow in Christlikeness as they gave themselves to the task of assisting the women to be of the same mind in the Lord.

In the midst of any conflict, our goal must be to become more like Christ—to have the mind of Christ. Having the mind of Christ means that we give effort to understanding our lives and circumstances from His perspective. We strive to know His Word and live in the energy of His Spirit. Paul knew that for the Philippians to deal effectively with conflict, they would need to make it their goal to become more like Christ. As they helped Euodias and Syntyche resolve their conflict, they needed to see and live life from His perspective.

9. Read Philippians 2:5–11. What characteristic and works of Christ do these verses emphasize?

Characteristic

Works

Christlike humility

To respond properly in the face of conflicts, God’s children must possess Christlike humility. Christ willingly veiled His glory, laid aside the independent exercise of all He shared with His Father, and became Man. In humility, Jesus Christ became forever undiminished deity and perfect humanity united in one person. In humility, Christ not only became a man, He became a servant—a bond slave doing the will of His Father and willingly serving others by becoming their perfect sacrifice for sin. Humility asks, “What is God’s will? What will bring glory to Him? How can I serve others?” Pride declares, “I don’t deserve to be treated this way. I want my way.”

Christlike obedience

Christ’s humility resulted in His perfect obedience. In conflict, we must give ourselves to submissive obedience to Him, the One Who deserves our full loyalty. In His humble allegiance to His Father, Jesus Christ, the Eternal One, submitted Himself to death. This fact alone should amaze us, but Christ’s humility resulted in obedience to a death of utter humiliation reserved for the worst of the offenders of His time. If we make Christlikeness our goal as we face conflict, we will refuse to respond with words of sinful anger.

We will not seek to persuade people to our points of view, but we will rather pray, speak, and act in ways that seek to lead people to God's perspective. We will refuse to give in to the temptation to make the conflict be about ourselves and our reputations. Instead we will commit ourselves to obeying the One Who made Himself of no reputation.

10. Read James 1:1–12. What does God promise to those who meet the trials and temptations of this life with humble obedience?

Christ's humble obedience demonstrated His trust in His Father, and His Father honored the obedience of His beloved Son. Our God is trustworthy. If we fail to trust God in conflict, we will be forced to trust fully in ourselves or others. Trusting anyone more than God always results in disappointment. That disappointment may lead to a fear and anxiety that controls us, or it may lead to all sorts of sinful responses toward other people. However, when we make Christlikeness our goal in conflict, we are demonstrating trust in Christ. Trusting Him will bring obedient peace in the midst of conflict, and in the end, it will bring reward from God.

11. Consider a recent conflict that you experienced. How did you demonstrate the mind of Christ through humility, obedience, and trust in God? Rejoice in God's work in your life.

12. Where did you fail to demonstrate the mind of Christ through humility, obedience, and trust in God?

Rejoice in God's work that reveals these sins to you through His Word. Confess to God these failures as sin, and commit yourself to renewed obedience. Resist the temptation to weaken your confession with any blame shifting.

13. Read Philippians 4:1–9. What key themes and commands do you notice as Paul instructed the Philippians concerning Euodias and Syntyche?

In the remainder of this study, we will direct our attention to Paul's instruction to the believers at Philippi to involve themselves with Euodias and Syntyche in helping them be of the same mind in the Lord. Paul emphasized four themes that will become the focus of our study. First, Paul emphasized the character and work of God. Second, Paul emphasized seeing others from God's perspective. Third, Paul emphasized correct thinking in the midst of conflict. And finally, Paul emphasized personal responsibilities of obedience in conflict.

Ask God to teach you from His Word as we study His will for us in the midst of life's conflicts. When necessary, confess your failure to handle conflicts in a Christlike manner. Commit yourself afresh to making your own growth in Christlikeness the goal. Rejoice that God makes sense out of the conflicts we experience and that He gives us wonderful ways to respond in the energy of the Spirit of His Son—responses that result in our growth in Christlikeness.