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Unfortunately, there is no clear objective way to determine if a given situation is indeed a personal conflict. But here is a checklist that will help. It is part of "the deeds of the flesh" list Paul gives in Galatians 5:19-21. I have here just listed those fleshly "deeds" which have to do with personal relationships.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are ...

- 1) *enmity*
- 2) *strife*
- 3) *jealousy*
- 4) *outbursts of anger*
- 5) *disputes*
- 6) *dissensions*
- 7) *factions*
- 8) *envying*

It's your call whether or not your situation is a personal conflict and therefore needs resolution--unless, of course, other believers have already noticed it and called you on it. But remember, the tendency will be to deny it because that's easier than to deal with it. I suggest, (1) use this eight-item check list, (2) be honest with yourself and God as you think about your situation, and (3) ask one or more other mature believers if they think this has developed into a personal conflict--if it has, it needs to be resolved.

The Cause of Conflict

I suspect conflict is caused by the existence of more than one autonomous being when those beings compete for autonomy. For example, the concept of Zeus, Aphrodite, and Apollo on Mt. Olympus shows us the ancient Greeks thought of their gods as autonomous beings who competed. As a contrast, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Trinity are autonomous beings, but they do not compete. However, the existence of God caused a conflict when the angel Lucifer tried to compete with God and became Satan. Conflict is caused by a competitive autonomy.

The prophets, Christ, and the apostles all revealed conflict because righteousness reveals sin. Conflict comes when any two or more autonomous beings (and we are all autonomous beings) compete over something which affects our autonomy to the point where we hate the other being. If we were all in harmony with the autonomy of God, then we would not have a conflict with God or with each other. Since there are no limits to divine resources, there is no need to compete for them. Personal conflict is framed in a context of competing for temporary limited earthly resources.

Conflict with Unbelievers

The biblical prescription for resolving personal conflicts presupposes that the person wishing the conflict to be resolved has received Jesus Christ as his or her personal God and Savior. Believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, who compels them to go to the written Word of God in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible for their answers. This does not necessarily presuppose that the other person is a believer. The person we perceive as causing the conflict might be a believer or an unbeliever. This material only assumes that the conflict **resolver** is a believer.

Chapter 1

Secular Conflict Resolution in the Post-Modern World

The secular approach to conflict resolution is important to be aware of because when we know it, we are less likely to repeat it. Also, if we do not learn it, we will be less able to see the significant difference between the world's approach and the scriptural approach. The real danger is the temptation to integrate or combine the two. This is what all the bad kings of Israel did when they built the high places. This is also why the apostles warned the church against false teachers rising up from among themselves. This same sort of mixing the world with the Word happens today in many Christian circles when it comes to things like psychotherapy, marriage counseling, parenting advice, financial disputes, and business success. This is not, of course, to say that every secular idea is bad. Many of the nuts and bolts are good. But they are building the wrong machine.

According to secular counseling, conflict is related to things like tension and stress. People are dysfunctional, codependent, or saddled with addictive tendencies due to their genetic background, social history, personality type, or birth order. According to the Bible, people are sinners (Romans 3:10-23). [For further discussion on this, see Appendix C, where some of the differences between secular counseling and Biblical discipleship are cited.]

One of the popular secular systems was presented by Stephen Covey. In his bestselling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey listed seven habits which pretty much summarize the world's success techniques. Here is a brief outline of Covey's material. [This summary is directly quoted from his summary brochure (1997, Franklin Covey Co., U.S.A.), except the bracketed comments, which I have added for clarity in translation to non-English speaking audiences.]

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey

Habit 1: Be Proactive [taking responsibility]

The habit of being proactive, of personal vision, means taking responsibility for your attitudes and actions. It's helpful to break the word "responsibility" into two parts: response/ability. Proactive people recognize that they have the ability to choose their responses. Their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feelings. ... the proactive model states that between stimulus and response lies our freedom to choose our responses.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind [setting goals]

This is the habit of personal leadership, meaning you begin each day or task with a clear understanding of your desired direction and destination. ... The most effective way to begin with the end in mind is to develop a mission statement, philosophy, or creed that focuses on what you want to be (character) and do (contributions).

Habit 3: Put First Things First [Doing the important instead of the urgent]

This is the habit of personal management, which involves organizing and managing your time according to the personal priorities you established in Habit 2. ... As you invest more time on the planning, prevention, and relationship-building activities ... you'll find that you spend far less time picking up the broken pieces or reacting to the urgent demands of other people.

[Habits 1-3 are about moving from "dependence" to "independence." Habits 4-7 are about moving from independence to interdependence.]

Habit 4: Think Win-Win [resolving conflicts where both parties win]

Most of us learn to base our self-worth on comparisons and competition. We think about

succeeding in terms of someone else failing. There is only so much pie, and if you get a big piece, there is less for me. ... Win-win, on the other hand, is based on an Abundance Mentality ... Win-win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial and satisfying.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood [Listen before Speaking]

We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; ... They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiographies into other people's lives. In contrast, Empathic Listening gets inside another person's frame of reference. You see the world the way he or she sees it, you understand how he or she feels.

Habit 6: Synergize [doing creative problem solving]

This is the habit of creative cooperation or teamwork. Two people, creatively cooperating, will be able to produce far better results than either one could alone. ... When we value differences and having different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect, people feel free to seek the best possible alternative, often the Third Alternative—one that is substantially better than either of the original proposals.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw [Practicing Personal Development]

This is the habit of self-renewal ... when people get busy producing or "sawing," they rarely take time to sharpen the saw. ... Sharpening the saw means having a balanced, systematic program for self-renewal in the four areas of our lives: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual.

But this is not unique. Covey's seven habits have been taught in one form or another in the western secular business and educational community since the 1970s. I personally heard all these principles from the *Creative Problem Solving Institute* on the campus of the University of New York at Buffalo in the early 1970s. Abraham Maslow was (and still is) the hero of what is known as self-actualization, which is basically the same as Covey's foundational idea of developing your own value system. This idea has also been accepted and taught by many New Age pantheists, Buddhists, and liberal Jews. The only thing this new post-modern secular success system leaves behind is atheism. Atheism taught the stimulus-response system of behavioral psychology and capitalistic success based on a win-lose mentality. That was "modern" thinking, and it dominated the western secular world from about the 1840s through the 1960s. But post-modernism basically follows systems like Covey's, based on Maslow's self-actualization.

Modernism and post-modernism can be compared as follows:

Modernism	Post-Modernism
1840s–1960s	1970s–present
The industrial revolution	The information revolution
The age of the machine	The age of the computer
Believed in absolute truth	Believes in relative truth
The vertical (the priority of God) gave way to the horizontal (the priority of people)	The horizontal (the priority of people) specializes in individual felt needs (and the priority of meeting those "needs")
Focused on naturalism	Focuses on spiritualism
Developed atheism	Embraces pantheism
Created Communism	Creates individualism
Used behavioral psychology (stimulus response)	Uses creative innovation (stimulus-choice-response)
Taught objective values	Teaches independent values
Focused outside the individual—knowing the truth	Focuses inside the individual—self-actualization
Pursued win-lose	Pursues win-win

I have illustrated post-modernism with Covey's system because it is one (of several) that popularized Abraham Maslow's concept (of the 1970s) known as self-actualization. Here is a summary of the four possible ways to resolve conflicts according to Covey:

Lose-lose—That's where we both lose. This probably happens whenever you take somebody to court. The problem with this is obvious—we lose.

Lose-win—That's where I lose and you win. This happens when I give in, have a defeated attitude, and say, "Yeah, well, woe is me. Go ahead and have your own way. You always get what you want anyway." The problem with this is I build up a resentment and look for ways to get even.

Win-lose—That's where I win and you lose. This assumes there is only so much to go around, so I get something at the expense of you losing something. The problem with this is it tempts my opponent to get even—hence the reason wars and ethnic conflicts go on and on.

Win-win—That's where we both win. This happens as a result of thinking we are both right from our own perspective, so we can create a solution good for both of us via creative problem solving (synergy = synchronized energy).

But this is the thinking of post-modernism not biblical Christianity. Some argue all truth is God's truth, so it's okay to Christianize the world's methods. The problem is, it is very hard to demonstrate that a concept is indeed true, and hence God's truth, if it is not found in the Bible. Both modernism and post-modernism are worldly not biblical. Stephen Covey is a Mormon. Abraham Maslow was a Jew. Most post-modernists are pantheists or universalists in their concept of God. For example, as a Mormon, it makes sense for Covey to say we should all develop our own spiritual values, then negotiate via win-win (move from dependence to independence to interdependence) because Mormons believe they are all potential gods. It makes sense to the pantheists because we are all a collection of potential cosmic god energy. It makes sense to the universalists because any path up the mountain to any god we want to reach is okay. But this is of the world not the Word of God.

Please understand that my objection concerns applying modern or post-modern systems to Christian believers resolving personal conflicts. I am not objecting to the use of these systems for situations which do not involve personal conflict. I have not researched other areas with this system, so I have no conclusions to offer. Let me repeat what I said earlier. I suspect there are good nuts and bolts in the system, but they build the wrong machine for personal conflict resolutions. It's also crucial to understand that biblical conflict principles should not be applied to unbelievers. Non-Christians do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Neither do we live in a theocracy like Old Testament Israel where God's law can be dictated. Actually, worldly solutions may work very well for the world. For example, if a person decides he would rather spend eternity in hell and live for a few brief years for himself here on earth, God's vertical principles won't do him much good. Or suppose someone sees himself pantheistically as being a collection of spiritual energy, ridding himself of karma in order to become one with the universal god-force. If so, vertical thinking that relates him to a personal eternal God, who will judge him with eternal consequences, won't be of much interest.

Worldly solutions may "work" in a pragmatic world, where biblical solutions are of little value. True, ideas like some of the Proverbs may seem helpful in business. But that's usually true only in a culture which honors biblical values, such as the American Midwest and Deep South, where the meaning of Christian values still lingers. Truth is, business values and biblical values just overlap. It's not that they are the same. For example, you hear, "If you are honest, you'll do better in business in the long run." Yes, perhaps. But there are a lot of dishonest "successful" people. I also know people who have lost their jobs because they were honest. More important, truth is given in the Bible not for us to be successful in business but to honor, obey, and bring glory to God. What if truth or humility or some other biblical virtue hinders business? Do we then honor business or God? For example, Jesus said, *if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also* (Matthew 5:38-42) and ... *and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back* (Luke 6:30). How many businesses operate by that principle?

At the end of each chapter, we shall briefly present a conflict situation and ask you to formulate a resolution. Then we shall suggest both a worldly solution and a biblical solution. Remember, the worldly solution may be a "good" one for unbelievers, living horizontally for this life, disregarding eternity. Biblical solutions are good only for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who have their focus set eternally.

Here's a Situation

The owner of a company hires a salesman who comes to him with good recommendations. But after a year and repeated training, the salesman is just not doing the job. Other sales people double his performance, even those with smaller territories. It's clear he is not making enough calls on his customers. Besides, there is evidence he is cheating on his expense report. The employer has had it with this guy. Meanwhile, the salesman's infant son has developed a heart condition that makes it important for him to remain on the company's insurance policy.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
<p>This employee is hurting himself and the company. The employer needs to discuss a win-win solution, where the salesman can either increase his performance while shaping up his expense report, or find another job where his insurance benefits can be transferred or be duplicated. The employer cannot let the company be hurt by this salesman, and the salesman must be given a chance and enough help to better himself here or elsewhere.</p>	<p>Whether the salesman stays with this company or not depends on how his job affects his, and his employer's, relationship with God. Cheating on his expense report is not a problem between he and the company. It's a problem between he and God. The same goes for the employer's response to the problem. The employer should help the salesman develop his relationship with God, while carefully watching his own (Galatians 6:1-2). Whether that is best done with the salesman in the company or in another one should be discussed. But the issue is not what is good for the company but how can each of these men best use their assets to glorify God.</p>

Chapter 2

The Biblical Perspective for Resolving Conflicts— Vertical Thinking

Every character or group in the Bible who resolved their conflicts by **leaving God out**, did so with the same basic assumption of both the modernists and the post-modernists (and also the pre-modernists). Those who left God out saw their situation as a conflict between themselves and some other person (or group). They, therefore, usually attempted to resolve the problem with some win-lose or win-win system.

But the men and women of God never did that. Godly people, when acting consistent with the will of God, saw the situation in a completely different way.

Godly people saw conflict situations primarily as a conflict with God, not as a conflict with people. They saw it vertically, not horizontally.

Let's consider a few examples:

1. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8, 1 John 3:12)

The apostle John wrote, ... *Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous* (1 John 3:12). Cain saw God's rejection of his sacrifice as a conflict with Abel. John tells us the reason was because his own deeds were evil. God defined the problem as a conflict between Cain and God, but Cain didn't see it that way. He saw his problem as a competition with his brother and resolved it with win-lose. But John tells us that's because Cain's own deeds were evil. In other words, Cain's problem was a conflict between himself and God.

You can count on it. If you hate someone, it's because your own deeds are evil. You've looked at the conflict as one between you and some other person instead of between you and God.

2. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25–32)

There was a long-term conflict between Jacob and his brother Esau. On two separate occasions (one with the help of his mother), Jacob cheated Esau out of his birthright. Esau was angry. We read in Genesis 27:41, *So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*

Jacob fled to Haran where he stayed for 20 years and acquired a great wealth of sheep, camels, donkeys, many servants ... and 11 children. Then he left Haran to return to his own country. Just before he got there, he learned that his brother Esau was coming to meet him, with 400 men. So Jacob, afraid of the revenge of his brother, prayed for help (Genesis 32:9-11). Then Jacob proceeded to cross the Jabbok River. But after his family caravan crossed, he faced a messenger from God who wrestled with him all night. In essence, God told Jacob his problem was not with Esau. God could handle Esau. Jacob's problem was with God. What he needed was God's blessing, not just a strategy to negotiate with Esau. Jacob needed to look at this vertically not horizontally.

3. Joseph and His Brothers (Genesis 37–50)

Joseph was hated by his brothers, who were jealous because their father favored Joseph. So they sold him into slavery into Egypt. They saw the situation as a conflict between themselves and Joseph.

But Joseph didn't look at it that way. Joseph saw the whole situation as an opportunity to serve God—first with Potiphar, then in prison, and finally before Pharaoh. When Joseph's brothers were forced to come to Egypt, Joseph took care of the whole family. Notice Joseph's comment to his brothers, *But*

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph didn't look at the situation as a conflict with his brothers. Conflicts to Joseph were vertical not horizontal.

4. Moses and Pharaoh (Exodus 2:11—4:31)

When Moses killed the Egyptian who was beating up on a Hebrew, he was looking at the conflict horizontally, as between himself (or the Hebrews) and the Egyptians. He attempted to resolve it via win-lose. But 40 years later, Moses heard God in a burning bush on Mt. Horeb. He left that experience with a whole different view of the conflict. It was a struggle for Moses, but he finally looked at it God's way. From then on, he saw the situation as one of vertical obedience to God not as a horizontal conflict with Pharaoh.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, saw it as a conflict between himself and Moses. But God revealed that the whole thing was His work from start to finish. We read, *And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go"* (Exodus 4:21). In essence, God said that the situation was His. The conflict was with Him. Even the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was His. So Moses was to not look at Pharaoh but look at God. Moses was to think vertically not horizontally (Romans 9:14-18.)

5. David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)

Goliath saw this conflict as between the Philistines (his people) and the Israelites (their people). He said, *If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us* (1 Samuel 17:9). In other words, it's a horizontal conflict.

But David did not see the situation as just a conflict between two armies. He saw it as a conflict between the Philistines and God. Read what David said to Goliath. *Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted ... the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands"* (1 Samuel 17:45 and 47). David saw the conflict vertically.

6. David and Saul (1 Samuel 18–26)

As soon as David received more praise than Saul, Saul defined their relationship as a conflict between himself and David (1 Samuel 18:7-9). But David did not look at it that way. David saw his role as one of obedience to God, not one of fighting Saul. Notice David's attitude. *So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed"* (1 Samuel 24:6). Vertical thinking!

7. Daniel and the Satraps of Babylon (Daniel 6)

I'm not completely sure what a satrap did, but it was some governmental leadership position that served Darius, the king of the Medes and the Persians. There were 120 of them, and 3 commissioners were over them, of which Daniel was one (Daniel 6:1-2). We read, *Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him* (Daniel 6:3-4).

For some reason, the other two commissioners and the 120 satraps didn't like Daniel. It could be because Daniel was a Jew or it could be just plain old-fashioned jealousy, but they wanted to get rid of him. They saw him as a problem and created a horizontal conflict with the purpose of having him exterminated in a lions' den. After the night with the lions, Darius, who liked Daniel, came and ... *cried out with a troubled voice*, asking Daniel if he was all right. Daniel answered from inside the den, *My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime* (Daniel 6:22).

You will look in vain to find any action or statement by Daniel against the officials who had him thrown into the lions' den. Daniel simply never mentions it. His whole focus is on God. Daniel saw the situation vertically not horizontally.

8. Christ and the Pharisees

The Pharisees (and, for that matter, the Sadducees, the chief priests, and the elders) saw a conflict between themselves and Jesus. They defined it horizontally. Jesus had nothing good to say about the Pharisees (Matthew 23), but He never defined His mission as opposing them but rather as obeying God. When He was about to be killed, initiated primarily by the Pharisees, Jesus prayed, "*I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do*" (John 17:4). Jesus didn't look at His life as a conflict with the Pharisees but as a mission to serve God. He saw it vertically not horizontally.

9. Paul and the Non-Christian Jews

When Paul entered a synagogue and spoke about Jesus as the Messiah, some believed, but most saw Paul as a problem. The Jews defined the problem as a conflict between Paul and themselves, to be resolved by defeating Paul. For example, we read, *But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead* (Acts 14:19).

But Paul did not speak in synagogues to take on the Jews. He did it to preach the gospel. As he said, *And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it* (1 Corinthians 9:23). Paul's goals were vertical not horizontal. His point was to participate in the gospel not to defeat the synagogue Jews.

10. John and Diotrephes (3 John 9-11)

When John's friend Gaius was thrown out of his church for supporting itinerate missionaries, John wrote a letter in his defense. Let's read some of it. *I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God* (3 John 9-11).

Diotrephes, who loved to be first among them, had unjustly accused the Apostle John with wicked words and also attacked Gaius. Apparently, Diotrephes saw this as a horizontal conflict between he and Gaius locally, and even between himself and the Apostle John ultimately.

But John dealt with the conflict vertically. In verses 1-8 he commended Gaius for *walking in the truth* (verses 3-4). In verse 11 he said, *do not imitate what is evil, but what is good*, and the reason was, *the one who does good is of God*. John never advised Gaius to take on Diotrephes at all. John suggested the conflict be resolved vertically by imitating what is good because it is of God. The apostle himself never did anything horizontally about Diotrephes. John never said he'd remove him from the church or work out their differences or negotiate a win/win settlement. He said he would point out Diotrephes' evil deeds, that is, his deeds against God—vertically.

The world will always define conflicts horizontally—between ourselves and someone else or between our people and theirs, such as conservatives vs. liberals, our nation vs. their nation, husbands vs. wives, children vs. parents, Arabs vs. Jews, Protestants vs. Catholics, Orthodox vs. Baptists. But godly people never see it that way. Godly people see all conflicts as not with the other person at all but between their own sin nature and the will of God. If I have a conflict, it is between me and God. So if I hate someone, I have a conflict. But my conflict is with God. If he hates me, then he has a conflict. If I don't hate him, then only he has the conflict, but his conflict is with God.

Having understood that the real conflict is between ourselves and God, we can now face the other person in an entirely different way and with an entirely different set of principles, to accomplish an entirely different objective. Now our principles do not come from our own independently established value system (or self-actualization) but from the written Word of God. Now our objective is not to win but to bring glory to God. We still have to deal with the other person, of course, but now that will be done as a function of our obedience to God. Our actions toward the other person will be directed by God, with the objective of pleasing God. We will seek the best good for ourselves and the other person, but now that "best good" is defined not by what either of us want but what God says is the best good.

Here's a Situation

A woman hates her mother-in-law. Her husband's mother objected to their marriage because the wife's background was not high enough socially. Now her mother-in-law coaxes the children away from her, tries to monopolize her husband, and intentionally does not invite her to family and social functions. Her mother-in-law gossips about the way she dresses, keeps her house, and nearly everything she teaches the children. The wife has tried to ignore it, but now it's developed into a full-blown hatred between the two.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
<p>The wife needs to lay down the law to her mother-in-law and her husband, too, if he will not support her. She needs to make it clear to her children what her mother-in-law is doing, pointing out her lies and gossip. If her husband doesn't handle the situation, she needs to threaten him with severe consequences. The wife needs to tell him she will take the children and move if the situation is not rectified.</p>	<p>The husband should deal with the situation and stop cleaving to his mother (Genesis 2:24). But the wife needs to understand that if she hates her mother-in-law, she has a problem with God not her mother-in-law. To hate her mother-in-law is to disagree with God about the life situation He placed her in (1 Corinthians 10:31). Of course, the specifics must be dealt with but only in a context that looks for heavenly rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10) not in revenge, or even justice, here on earth. In heaven, we will not regret our circumstances on earth—only our sin and lack of faith.</p>

Chapter 3

Confession—Agreeing with God that We Fail to Keep His Expectations

Confession is one of the first steps in personal conflict resolution. But biblically, that is not primarily a confession to another person.

I can find no passage in the Bible which tells us to confess to one another sins we have committed against each other

Now if this bothers you, bear with me through this chapter and the next one on forgiveness. Remember, this chapter is about confession, not being reconciled to a brother or making amends. We are looking only at the word *confession*. The primary idea of confession in the Bible is confession of sin to God as a means of repentance—as, for example, proclaimed by the ministry of John the Baptist and the Apostle John (Mark 1:4-5 and 1 John 1:9). There are only two passages where people confessed their sins to one another: one was for the purpose of fellowship (Acts 19:18) and the other was for prayer support (James 5:16). What they did not do is confess their sins to one another, which they committed against one another, to be forgiven by one another.

What It Means to Confess Our Sin

The word “confess” is the Greek word *homologeō*. It comes from two words. The first is *homo*, meaning “that which is the same,” as in our word “homosexual.” The other is *logos*, which means “word.” So to confess is to say the same words as the one to whom you are confessing.

To confess is to agree. When I confess my sin to God, I am agreeing with God about my sin. I am saying the same thing as He is saying about it.

Confessing our Sin to One Another

Now let's discuss those two verses that talk about confessing our sins to one another. One is James 5:16. It reads, *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

The context of this verse is one of prayer for healing. James says that sickness may be due to sin, which, when confessed, restores the sick. (Note that he is not saying all or even most sickness is due to sin but that sin is one possible source of sickness.) Then he extends that confession “to one another.” But the context is still that of healing by God for sin against God. So the confession is not a confession of one's sin against another person. It's confessing to one another that we have sinned against God in order for them to join with us in asking God to forgive us of our sin against Him.

The other passage is Acts 19:18. The point here is to admit to one another we are sinners, acknowledging that there are no secrets before God. It's when we feel genuine remorse before God, and we want others to know that, for the sake of fellowship (Galatians 1:13-16). But this is not about confessing sin to one another to be forgiven by one another.

This does not mean we should not apologize when our actions hurt others. Webster defines *apologize* as *acknowledge and express regret for a fault, wrong, etc.* [Webster's New World College Dictionary, 1999, p. 66]. To apologize is just a common courtesy which acknowledges our regret. But this is a cultural, not a biblical, mandate. The word *apologize* never occurs in the Bible. It's a very general term that is not designed to deal with sin. Confession of sin is different. It recognizes the one we confess to as the author of the spiritual/moral values we have broken. But that must be reserved for God.

Confessing our sin to God is not always private (see Matthew 3:6, Mark 1:5, Acts 19:18). Confessing our sin to God in front of others may be valuable because it helps us clarify the extent of our sin before God.

What there is no biblical basis for is confessing sin to one another which we have committed against one another. The saying "confession is good for the soul" is usually unbiblical, since it typically means "confessing wrongs committed against one another to one another is good for your own psychological well-being." This is horizontal thinking, which leaves God out. It is always relevant to apologize if your action is causing an ongoing conflict. But apologizing seems to lose its relevance with the passing of time. I would apologize if I bumped into you in a busy hallway today but probably not for having bumped into you last month or last year. The reason is, the word *apologize* doesn't really deal with sin. I'm less likely to use the word *apologize* for stealing money from you or raping your daughter. Real sin is a violation against God's law and requires coming to God.

Should We Confess Past Sins to One Another?

Since there is no biblical basis for confessing sins we have committed against one another to one another, there is no biblical basis for confessing past sins to one another. This question seems to assume that our basic conflict is with the other person instead of with God. The confession to one another in James 5 is one of a current situation not a past forgotten one. Besides that, the current situation is due to sin against God and the confession to others is for their prayer support. Bringing up past sins (which we are only now confessing to God) for the prayer support of other believers is helpful, but there is nothing here about confessing past sins to others whom we have wronged.

This is not to say we should ignore the one we have wronged. Quite the contrary. We should go back and make things right—even give back more than we have taken (Luke 19:8-9, *see also* 2 Samuel 21:1-14). But that is not about confession. Confession is done to God because forgiveness is primarily a vertical thing.

Here's a Situation

Someone comes to you and says: "Something you said to me over a year ago really offended me. You said, "... [he tells you what it was], and that offended me so much, I've been angry with you ever since. I should have forgiven you, but I didn't. Now I realize my anger with you is sin, and I'm coming to you to confess my sin of anger over what you said."

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
You should say, "Thank you for coming to me. I'm really sorry you were offended, and I forgive you for your anger against me. I shouldn't have said something which offended you. I need to confess to you the sin of offending you."	You should say, "I appreciate your apology, but as to confessing your sin, you are actually talking to the wrong person. You must confess your sin to God, not me (1 John 1:9). If you have already confessed it to God, there is no need to confess it to me, unless you want me to pray for you. However, if you want to discuss the substance of the matter which offended you, I'll be happy to do that (Matthew 18:15)."

Chapter 4

Forgiveness—Accepting the Consequences for Someone Else's Sin

Forgiveness is the act of violating justice (an eye for an eye) by accepting upon ourselves the hurtful consequences of someone's action. So if we pursue justice, seek revenge, harbor bitterness, or maintain hatred, we have not forgiven.

Three Basic Principles of Forgiveness

1. *We should never attempt to, or claim to, forgive people of their sin against God.*

Forgiveness of sin is seen in the Bible primarily as an act of God. Daniel wrote, *To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him* (Daniel 9:9). The reason forgiveness is up to God is because all sin is against God. By definition, sin is anything contrary to the character of God. Right and wrong are not our own inventions, they come from God.

For example, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah sent to the front lines of battle until he was killed. When confronted with and convicted about his sin, David prayed, *Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge* (Psalm 51:4; see also Genesis 39:9). David, in his hour of deepest remorse, begs God for forgiveness (Psalm 51:7-12). The text never says David asked the forgiveness of, say, Bathsheba or Uriah's family. From God's perspective, the sin was not primarily committed against Bathsheba or Uriah. They were the focus of David's sin but not the definers of it. Neither were they victims of it. **From God's perspective, there are no victims and no accidents.** Uriah was not a victim. He went to heaven right on schedule. And Bathsheba's baby was not an accident. The moral evil was done against God, who commanded people not to commit adultery and murder. There is not one single command in the Bible for any human being to forgive anyone else of sin against God. (See also Luke 15:18, 21.) So, like confession, the biblical concept of forgiveness is primarily a vertical issue.

2. *We must always forgive people who ask for forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22).*

The Bible does give examples of sins against people (Genesis 20:9; Exodus 10:16-17; 1 Samuel 2:25; 19:4; 24:11; Matthew 18:21; Luke 17:3-4). Let's look at that a minute. It is not sufficient to define sin against us as something someone does to us which affects us adversely. Just because we suffer adverse consequences, due to someone's actions toward us, doesn't make it sin. For example, the Israelites were commanded to wipe out the Canaanites, Paul excommunicated the brother in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5), and Peter was used to put Ananias and Sapphira to death (Acts 5). People causing the adversity might be acting in obedience to God.

There are at least two senses in which it is legitimate to say I sinned against you. One, when my sin against God is directed toward you. For example, David's sin of murder was directed against Uriah, but it was God who commanded us not to commit murder. Two, when my sin against God causes you pain. In this case, you suffer the fallout or consequences of my sin against God. If we read about rape in the newspaper, we call it sin. If someone rapes our wife or daughter, we call it sin against us. In this case, the sin was directed against them, but we suffer the consequence of it.

What about those who repeatedly sin against us (in one of these senses) and repeatedly ask for forgiveness?

We must continue to forgive those who continue to ask for forgiveness (Luke 17:3-4; 23:34; Acts 7:60)

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," forgive him (Luke 17:3-4).

3. We must forgive people of their sin against us whether they ask for it or not.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ... For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). There is another aspect to forgiveness. On the cross, Jesus Christ took forgiveness to a whole different level. He extended the forgiveness from those who ask for it, to those who do not ask for it or even acknowledge their sin. He said, "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34 *see also* Ephesians 4:32). To be Christlike, therefore, means to forgive those causing us suffering even though they do not ask for it and even when they feel justified in causing the suffering.

This was reiterated by Stephen when he was stoned to death. We read, *And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep* (Acts 7:60). Obviously, Stephen understood Christ's forgiveness of the unrepentant as a standard for all Christians. Remember, my forgiveness is taking on the consequences of another's sin. **It has only to do with me and God, not the one sinning.** Forgiveness does not focus on the other person. It is vertical not horizontal. Parents, children, husbands, wives, church members, neighbors, and business associates will sin against you and never ask for forgiveness. If they do, it's essential that we forgive them. The reason is not to restore fellowship with them. That may not be possible. The reason is to keep or restore our fellowship with God. We must forgive them unilaterally and unconditionally because that's the standard Christ set for us.

Here's a Situation

A husband is having an affair with his secretary. His wife finds out about it, confronts him, and he agrees to stop. Then she finds out he is back with the secretary again. This happens repeatedly, and the wife is full of anger and emotionally devastated.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
She should divorce him or threaten to divorce him to force him to take it seriously. If she decides to stay married to him, she should demand he see a counselor. If he refuses to see a counselor, she should divorce him and make sure she gets custody of the children and sufficient alimony and child support.	She should forgive him whether he asks for it or not. She should thank God, considering it all joy that she has encountered trials which can mature her faith (1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24; James 1:2-4). This is not to say she should restore him to his normal role of husband or trust him (as we will discuss in the next chapter). She should seek the counsel of some godly older Christian women (Titus 3:2). She should ask some mature Christian men to confront her husband about his sin, bring others to confirm all the facts (Matthew 18), and to take appropriate disciplinary action.

Chapter 5

Restoration—Bringing Someone Back to Their Former Condition

This is one of the oldest and most troublesome issues in the church. For example, one of the biggest questions in the church of the 100s and 200s (the centuries of the great persecutions and martyrdoms) was: Should those who have denied Christ, under persecution, be restored to fellowship if they repent of it? Through the centuries the church has had to deal with those who seek restoration after committing idolatry, fraud, adultery, perjury, and nearly every serious sin. [For this material, the words “restoration” and “reconciliation” are used synonymously. Reconciliation is usually more personal and restoration more positional, but I shall treat them together under the term “restoration.”]

***Restoration** is the act of bringing someone back to a former state by reestablishing the former condition*

Let's summarize the differences between the direction of *confession, forgiveness, repentance, and restoration.*

Confession is always done to God. But there are two types of *forgiveness*. One is done unilaterally before God concerning anyone who has wronged us. This is where we forgive people irrespective of their response to us. The second is done when the one who wrongs us *repents* of their sin to God and to us. Where the first one may or may not lead to restoration, the second one should always lead to *restoration*—at least the restoring of fellowship.



Matthew records this conversation. *Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven”* (Matthew 18:21-22). Peter is referring back to a statement Christ made recorded in verse 15, *and if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother*. Peter is wondering, if my brother repents but keeps on sinning, how long do I keep on forgiving him? Christ answers with a parable about a king who forgave a slave his debt until he learned that this slave did not forgive a debt which was owed him (v. 33-34). Christ’s point is, if you don’t keep on restoring your repentant brother, why should God keep on restoring you (Matthew 18:35)? (See also Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25; and Ephesians 4:32.) So here we have a forgiveness which should always lead to restoration of fellowship—namely when the forgiveness is requested by the sinner.

Two Basic Principles of Restoration

1. *We should restore to fellowship anyone who humbles themselves and asks for forgiveness (1 Samuel 24:16-22; 26:21, 25; Galatians 6:1-5; see again Matthew 18:21-22 with Luke 17:3-4).*

Repentance must be real. “I’m sorry ... but” is not repentance. For example, “I’m sorry I had an affair, but if you would have been a better wife, it wouldn’t have happened.” “I’m sorry I lied about our product, but everybody does it.” These are not statements of repentance. They are not real requests for restoration. “I’m sorry, but ...” is an explanation not repentance. When we hear it, we must ask if the speaker is repenting or explaining. When the pilot of your flight says, “I’m sorry we are late, but we are waiting on baggage from another flight,” he is explaining, not repenting. Explainers are not repenting and repenters are not explaining. **Explanations don’t require restoration. Repentance does.**

We are not to judge if the repentance is genuine or sincere, only God can do that. We are to simply determine if the nature of the statement is actually one of repentance vs. one of explanation. God calls us to repentance not explanations. By the way, you don’t pray that way, do you? You know, “God, I’m sorry I sinned, but if You had only been in my situation, You’d see that I couldn’t help it.” “I’m sorry, but ...” is not real vertical repentance or real horizontal repentance either. However, every real horizontal request for restoration must be met with a reuniting of fellowship, no matter how many times it’s repeated due to

repetition of the offense. The repenter's sincerity should not be questioned. Saul kept trying to kill David, and David restored fellowship with him each time Saul asked for it. Notice:

Corrective measures may be necessary to help the one restored to fellowship stay away from some particular sin (2 Corinthians 2:6). On the other hand, corrective measures must be limited and in the context of comfort and reaffirmation of love (2 Corinthians 2:7-11). Horizontal restoration is essential because repentance is primarily vertical. Horizontal repentance to others leading to restoration must be preceded by and based on vertical repentance and confession before God. If the repentance is real (remember, "I'm sorry, but ..." is not repentance), then it is up to God, not us, to determine if it is genuine.

2. Restoration does not erase the consequences of the sin.

There is only so much fellow believers can do for repentant sinners. They can restore them to fellowship (reconciliation) and even to their former position (if they are still qualified for it), but they cannot wipe out their sin (only God can do that) or its effects (even God does not generally do that). Here are some examples:

- *Restoration of fellowship may not restore trust.* David forgave Saul, but he did not trust him (1 Samuel 27:1). That does not mean we are free to gossip or harbor bitterness by thinking, "I can forgive, but I can't forget." This usually means we continue to dwell on their sin or hold it over the other person. That is not forgiveness, that's horizontal thinking not vertical thinking. Nevertheless, it is very possible that the responsibilities of a forgiven person may need to be altered until trust is restored.
- *Restoration cannot overcome loss of qualifications to fill a position.* If a person, for example, is divorced or remarried or cannot manage his children or becomes addicted to alcohol or drugs or has destroyed his reputation in the community, he is not qualified to be an administrative leader in the church (1 Timothy 3:2-7). He should be removed from leadership not as a punishment but simply because he does not now meet the biblical qualifications for the position.
- *Restoration cannot restore a lost ability to serve.* For example, parenting, in the Bible, is a married thing not a single thing. Divorce ends the biblical model of parenting in the sense of setting and enforcing moral boundaries (Proverbs 22:6). Sin leading to unfaithfulness to God or immaturity may keep someone from teaching others (2 Timothy 2:2, Hebrews 5:11-12). Other believers can restore such a one to fellowship, but they cannot undo the damage done by sin. This is not a punishment, it's just the way it is.

Forgiveness (like grace, mercy, and compassion) does not erase the consequences of sin—in this life or the next. This is true whether it is God doing the forgiving or us forgiving others

Suppose you (because of depression or something) jump off the top of a fifteen-story building. As soon as you jump, you say to God, "This is one of the dumbest things I've ever done. God, will you forgive me?" God will essentially say, "Yes, of course, consider yourself forgiven," as you fall past the tenth floor. "No," you say, "what I really meant was, will You forget my sin, erase it from my record?" God will essentially say, "I'll never bring it up to you again. Consider it erased and forgotten," as you fall past the fifth floor.

The same is true if you kill someone, lie to them, have sex outside of marriage, give them AIDS, or divorce their mother or father. They should forgive you unilaterally, whether you ask for it or not. If you confess it as sin before God and ask for His forgiveness, then ask for their forgiveness, they should also restore you to fellowship. But that does nothing to erase the consequences of the sin.

For example, I know a man who came to Christ at age 49. He drank heavily most of his life and treated his wife and children like dirt. After receiving Christ, he confessed his sin to God and asked forgiveness of his wife and children. He began to work at restoring his relationships. At age 50, he was beginning to date his wife (although his children would still not see him). That same year, he died of sclerosis of the liver. He was forgiven but the consequences of his sins could not be erased. Surely he will be rewarded in heaven for his year of repentant activities. But there are many rewards for a life of faithful service unavailable to him. **Forgiveness erases sin but not the consequences of sin in this life or the next.**

Here's a Situation

A woman with a 13-year-old daughter has divorced her husband (the girl's father) and is having constant discipline problems with the daughter. It has developed into a personal conflict between the two of them. The mother claims the daughter has never forgiven her for the divorce, even though the daughter says she has. Yet the daughter refuses to keep her mother's parameters for her activities.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
<p>To forgive means to forget and restore one to their former position, no matter what they've done. The daughter has not really forgiven her mother or she wouldn't hold the divorce against her. The daughter should accept divorced parents as a normal part of modern life. It happens all the time these days. They should both see a counselor to work out the differences between them.</p>	<p>In the Bible, parenting (which includes the establishment of boundaries on activities) is a married thing not a single thing (1 Corinthians 7:14). Divorce ends parenting. The daughter's claim to forgive her mother for the divorce should be accepted at face value. It's illegitimate for the mother to question the daughter's sincerity (only God can do that). The mother can be forgiven but not restored to her former position as a married parent. She should, instead, be a friend and discipler of her daughter.</p>

We have learned that resolving conflict is a vertical thing. It all hinges on our relationship with God. Personal conflict is an opportunity to evaluate our relationship with God. That's done by several virtuous acts:

- (1) Confessing our own sins to God.
- (2) Forgiving the other person of the fallout we suffered from their sin, whether they ask for it or not.
- (3) If they repent of their sin, we should also restore them to fellowship and to any position not disqualified by the sin itself.

But it doesn't stop there. There is a deeper responsibility which we have to the other person themselves. Namely, ...

Chapter 6

Love—Doing the Best Good for the Other Person

The Pharisees asked Jesus a question, one they apparently had trouble with themselves. *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 22:36-40).

The Apostle Paul, in the context of telling the Galatians to serve one another, said, *For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Galatians 5:14). The Apostle John reiterated that idea when he wrote, *The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him* (1 John 2:10).

Notice, Christ gave the Pharisees two laws that summarized the whole Old Testament. (By the way, neither of them were in the Ten Commandments.) Notice, too, that there is a priority. Loving God is *the great and foremost commandment*, loving your neighbor is second. The first governs the second. The first creates the context for the second and gives it its meaning. The vertical governs the horizontal.

I recently heard a social economist make the observation that those countries with a free market economy (such as England and the U.S.A.), have the worst morals. In other words, the more a country emphasizes a free market, the more it tends (over time) to have a high divorce rate, a liberalizing of homosexuality, and an increase in things like household violence and abortion. The reason for this, I suggest, is because the free market functions on principles like, “The customer is always right,” and “Find out what the customer wants and give it to him.” When the economy focuses on the customer, it tries to please people, and all people have a sin nature. Left to its own desires, the sin nature will gradually overcome its inhibitions and increasingly pursue immorality.

The same can happen in “seeker” churches. When the goal is to have unbelievers attending regularly, then the program and the message may neglect or change biblical values because the biblical message is an offense (1 Corinthians 1:18) and a stench of death (2 Corinthians 2:16) to unbelievers. If we love people first instead of God first (although we never consciously think that’s what we are doing), we put the horizontal ahead of the vertical. When a church begins to ask, “What do people want in a church?” and then give it to them, the church itself can become a source of immorality because it appeals to the desires of the flesh. That, I suspect, is why Jesus emphasized loving God (the vertical) first and foremost.

The same would be true in counseling. If the objective is to help people by focusing on a love for people first and foremost, then counsel for those people can increasingly neglect biblical values. We’ll gradually tend to see counselees as customers, believe the customers are right, and give them what they want—permission for a divorce, a lawsuit, vengeful acts, etc. The same is true in evangelism. If we define evangelism as reaching the world for Jesus Christ (an objective nowhere suggested in the Bible), instead of being witnesses for Jesus Christ to the world (Acts 1:8, 2 Peter 3:15), we will tend to prioritize our love for people over our love for God. When the horizontal governs the vertical, our message will gradually tend to change to accommodate people. We will be tempted to find out what the customers want and give it to them. “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” “... at the end of broken dreams, people need the Lord ...,” “Give praise to the Lord, I just can’t tell you how much good that’s going to do you,” etc.

Just Exactly What Is Love?

“Love” in the passages above is the Greek word *agape*. It means to do the best good for the other person. This love always results in giving. *For God so loved the world that He gave ...* (John 3:16). But this giving is not swapping. *Agape* love is a one-way street. It is without reciprocity. It is a giving which cannot be given back. You can only receive it. What God gave was *His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*. How could that gift ever be reciprocated?

<i>So love is°</i>	<i>1) Doing the best good for someone</i>
	<i>2) which always results in giving</i>
	<i>3) which cannot be reciprocated</i>

Who Should We Love?

There are three possible targets for our love: (1) ourselves, (2) others, or (3) God

1. *Loving Ourselves*—If we serve ourselves selfishly, we will be miserable. [There is a self-service which is not selfish. We will discuss that in the next chapters.] The world is full of selfish people. They are always trying to love (give to) themselves at the expense of others. These people are generally miserable. We always reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7-8). Shortsighted people who live by taking from others are sowing seeds of misery. Before long, they are living (reaping) the results of selfish sowing. They usually respond with more selfishness, which only results in more misery on down the road. This, of course, will not resolve conflicts. Instead, it causes more of them, by inciting others to get even.

2. *Loving Others*—If we serve others, we'll be happy—but disappointed. The advantage to serving others is that it gets our focus off ourselves. People who serve others are almost always happier people. The problem with serving others comes when you stop and evaluate the effect of your work. It will almost always be disappointing. Most people are selfish. Many will take what you give and squander it. Some will even use it against you. Ghandi's efforts at peace were reversed right after his death. There are just as many poor people today as before Mother Theresa. All the modern diplomatic efforts for peace resulted in the 1900s being the bloodiest century in all history. People are incurable sinners (Romans 3:10-19). Serving (loving, giving to) others, as an end in itself, may seem to resolve conflict, but it is will be disappointing if you stop to evaluate your service long term.

3. *Loving God*—The only way to avoid disappointment with people is first and foremost to serve God from a biblical perspective. [By the way, if you do not have a biblical perspective, you will probably be disappointed with God.] Since God says to love our neighbors—brothers—enemies—we should do that. We will find, however, that when we love our neighbors or our enemies (and they are often the same people) as part of our love for God, we will also reap the benefit of inner joy and peace.

It sounds noble to say we should love everybody. But the reality is, only God has the capacity and opportunity to love the world. Jesus gave us the answer to the question, "Who should we love?" during His discussion with the lawyer of Luke 10. He reiterated the love formula listed above. Let's read it, beginning with Jesus' question to the lawyer. *And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"* (Luke 10:26-29).

Notice the lawyer understood the vertical context of horizontal love. The problem was, he apparently hated Samaritans. Jesus answered his question with the parable of the Good Samaritan. It seems that the neighbor we are to love is anyone we come across who has a need which we can fill.

Who should we love? God.

Who does God tell us to love? Our neighbor.

Who is our neighbor? Anyone in our sphere for whom we can do good.

So love resolves conflicts when we first and foremost love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. And in that vertical context, we should love our neighbor—the one in our sphere for whom we can do good. If someone has a conflict with us, they are probably within our sphere, and we then have the opportunity of serving that person within the context of our vertical love for God.

Applying the Love of God to My Neighbor

I believe it was Martin Luther who said, "Love God and do as you please." He did not mean we should adapt Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics and determine what is loving as we encounter various situations. That's defining love horizontally while disregarding the vertical. But if we understand Luther's statement vertically, it will provide a context for horizontal love. Let me give you three examples:

(1) Suppose I have a friend in a bad marriage who wants a divorce. If I look at his situation, how miserable he is and how miserable he is making his wife, I might say, "Here is a guy who needs a divorce." Then I'll be tempted to look in the Bible for loopholes. They are hard to find, so I will tend to warp some passage and reinterpret others, thinking, "Surely God would not want this couple to live like this." That's horizontal thinking. In this scenario, I reversed Christ's priority in Matthew 22:36-40 and prioritize the horizontal, thus making the vertical conform to it.

On the other hand, if I prioritize the vertical, I will conclude that it's clear from all the passages on divorce that God's preference is for him to stay married. God's priority is his holiness not his happiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). A bad marriage can be a good laboratory for developing holiness.

Love is defined as doing the best good. So loving my friend who wants a divorce is doing the best good for him. But that best good will be defined differently if I prioritize the horizontal over the vertical. The horizontal will tempt me to prioritize *happiness*. The vertical will prioritize *holiness*.

(2) Suppose a man wants to be an elder of a church and he seems to be biblically unqualified. What should we do? If we look at it horizontally first, we'll tend to find loopholes. We will look at how gifted he is and all the good he could do for our church, so we will look for justification which will allow him to be an elder. If we look at it vertically, we'll not ask "What can we get by with?" but "What is closest to the heart of God?"

(3) Suppose my daughter wants to marry a non-Christian boy who is a nice guy with a good job, and they are romantically in love. If I look at it horizontally, I'll be tempted to think, "I don't want my daughter to hate me. I like this guy. He would be a good provider. I'll see if I can justify not objecting to their marriage." If I look at it vertically, I'll see that the best good for my daughter is not to have a good relationship with me or marry an unbeliever she romantically loves, even if he is a good provider. The best good for my daughter is to obey the heart of God, which is against such a marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14).

How Should We Love?

I believe this is the question the Apostle Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians 13. Here is his list:

- (1) *Love is patient*
- (2) *love is kind and*
- (3) *[love] is not jealous;*
- (4) *love does not brag and*
- (5) *[love] is not arrogant,*
- (6) *[love] does not act unbecomingly;*
- (7) *it [love] does not seek its own,*
- (8) *[love] is not provoked,*
- (9) *[love] does not take into account a wrong suffered,*
- (10) *[love] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but*
- (11) *[love] rejoices with the truth;*
- (12) *[love] bears all things,*
- (13) *[love] believes all things,*
- (14) *[love] hopes all things,*
- (15) *[love] endures all things.*
- (16) *Love never fails* (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

But what if the other person rejects my love? What if they reject my patience and kindness? What if they don't appreciate the fact that I'm not jealous and don't brag? What if they ignore the fact that I'm not arrogant, don't act unbecomingly, nor seek my own? What if they don't respond to my not being provoked ... etc.? God gave us the answer through the prophet Ezekiel. He said, *As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them ... speak to them and tell them whether they listen or not* (Ezekiel 2:5, 3:11). Ezekiel was to obey God and bring God's Word to His people because it was God's Word not because they would appreciate it. Likewise, we are to love our neighbor—or enemy—the way God says to do it and because God says to do it, not because they will appreciate it. The love list of 1 Corinthians 13 represents unilateral changes that we make in ourselves which conform us to the character of God. These changes have nothing to do with whether or not someone else accepts them.

Here's a Situation

A 24-year-old girl is in love and has decided to marry a man who is an unbeliever and has been married previously. Her parents object to the marriage. It has become a personal conflict to the extent that the parents refuse to attend the wedding if she marries this man. The daughter claims her parents are not doing the loving thing.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
If the parents really wanted to show love for the daughter, they would support and attend the wedding. Love covers a multitude of sins. The loving thing for the parents to do is to build their relationship with their daughter and future son-in-law and not jeopardize alienation from their future grandchildren. They need to be part of the wedding in order to communicate to their son-in-law that their religion is not something that alienates people or disrupts families.	The parents and the daughter are responsible to uphold God's standard for marriage (Mark 10:11-12; 2 Corinthians 6:14), which includes her not marrying a previously married unbeliever. The parents' decision to not attend the wedding is a good one and a loving one, as long as they make it clear that the reason is a desire to not disobey God's Word. If the daughter proceeds to get married, the parents should not support the wedding. This communicates their love is first to God, then to their children, and to their future grandchildren. After the wedding, the parents should support the marriage as they should any marriage.

This brings up a very important issue. Most people want to resolve their conflict with some other person by changing the other person. But that is seeing the problem horizontally. Vertical thinking understands which person you should try to change. Resolving a conflict situation means ...

Chapter 7

Changing Yourself

Pursuing the Profit Motive

When we understand that our love decision is first and foremost a vertical one (how we relate to God), then we will look at conflict from the priority of our relationship with God not from making a priority of our relationship with the other person. That is not to say our relationship with the other person is unimportant. It's extremely important. But it must be framed within the context of our relationship with God. That being the case, we can only improve our relationship with the other person by changing our own relationship with God. If we see the resolution to the conflict as requiring a change in the other person instead of in ourselves, we are giving up all participation in resolving the conflict because the real conflict is vertical not horizontal.

Since you and God are the two involved in your conflict, the only person you can change is yourself

Never attempt to resolve a personal conflict by having the person you are in conflict with perform in a certain way. The reason most counselors hear cases of conflicts which cannot be resolved is because both parties want the other person to change. Hence both have taken themselves out of a position to resolve the conflict. So by definition the conflict is not resolvable. Jesus said, *And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye* (Matthew 7:3-5). The Apostle Paul wrote, *But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. For each one shall bear his own load* (Galatians 6:4-5). If you are going to begin to resolve a conflict, you must work on the only part of the conflict available to you—yourself.

I suspect the reason most don't want to change themselves is because they are looking at things horizontally instead of vertically. Looking at the other person, they don't see a need to change themselves, and they don't think self-change would do any good. But working on changing yourself is not to abandon what is in your own best self interest. Quite the opposite. It is to pursue what is the best for yourself. So it is not self-abasing to understand that you are the one you need to change. If we look at things vertically, we can see that we don't measure up to God's standard. To change in the direction of God's standard is in our own best self-interest.

How Do I Change Myself?

The biblical answer to this question is the opposite of the world's answer and, I might add, quite surprising. The Bible says the way I'm to change myself is not by pursuing selflessness but by pursuing eternal selfness. Jesus called it laying up treasure for yourself (Matthew 6:20). For example, suppose you have a bad marriage, your spouse is having an affair, treating you like dirt or being irritating in other ways. The Bible says to love your spouse. But I suggest that if you describe that as being selfless, you will never maintain a motivation for loving your spouse.

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 13. The verse before the 16 item "How to love" list says something fascinating. In the first two verses Paul says doing things without love is useless. Then he writes this: *And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing* (1 Corinthians 13:3, *emphasis mine*).

Notice here two remarkable things. Paul says it is possible to act sacrificially and not have love. But he also reveals that our basic motivation should be to profit. Paul says the reason action without love is useless is because *it profits me nothing*.

***The most basic motivation God gives us
for obedience to Himself is the profit motive***

***Profit is a hope for personal gain
and a fear of personal loss***

Here are a few examples. The God-given motive for Adam's obedience was the profitable situation in the Garden of Eden. Noah's motive for obedience was the profit of being delivered from the flood. Abraham's motive for obedience was the profit of having descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky. The motive God gave the children of Israel for keeping the law was that they themselves might live in the land of Israel and not be scattered or otherwise punished.

When we come to the New Testament, the reward promised changes from earthly things to heavenly things. But the profit motive remains the same. Jesus said, *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven* (Matthew 7:19-21). That's a profit motive.

The motive Jesus said we should have for giving is: *Give and it will be given to you* (Luke 6:38). That's a profit motive.

Why Not Just Do It Because We Love God?

A common response to this is, "I want to obey God because of my love for Him not to get a heavenly reward." That's good, but notice the Apostle Paul did not see an inconsistency between the two. Actually, he saw receiving rewards as the correct motive for serving God. He said (speaking of Christ), it should be our ambition *to be pleasing to Him*. Then in the next verse Paul explains why we have such an ambition. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad* (2 Corinthians 5:10). That's a profit motive.

Paul then goes on and applies the same motive to the reason we do evangelism. He says, *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men* (v. 11). That's a profit motive.

Selflessness is pantheistic not Christian

When God created man, He made him a spiritually distinct being capable of self-awareness and a desire for autonomy. That desire was not part of the fall of Genesis 3 but the creation of Genesis 1 and 2 in the Garden of Eden. Unlike the pantheistic religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and the New Age), the Bible sees humans as distinct beings who will remain distinct beings existing somewhere forever. They are not (as pantheism teaches) just a collection of cosmic spiritual energy which will ultimately blend back into the spiritual energy of the universe. The Bible says every human being is a distinct being capable of individual choices, and is aware of his or her own separate autonomous existence. The very nature of such a being is to seek, build, protect, and value that autonomy.

***All humans are made by God apart from any sin
nature to seek personal gain and avoid personal loss***

Aren't We to Deny Ourselves?

When the Bible says we are to die to self, it is referring to our old sin nature, our old self (1 Corinthians 15:31-32, Romans 6:11). Paul writes, ... *lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth* (Ephesians 4:22-24 [*emphasis mine*], see also Colossians 3:9-10). Self-interest is the most basic motive built into man by God. Virtues, goodness, and obedience to God will occur as a product of our exercising our own self-interest in being rewarded by God. Our heart's desire should be to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." God asked the Old Testament Israelites, *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* (Ezekiel 18:31). In other words, why are you not doing what is in your own best self-interest? Why don't you have a profit

motive? Jim Elliot made one of the most quoted appeals for becoming a Christian. He said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." That's a profit motive.

What about Altruism?

Altruism (an "unselfish regard for ... the welfare of others," *Webster's 9th New College Dictionary*, page 76) simply does not exist. Altruism (i.e., selflessness) is a myth. Nobody, including God, is altruistic. Everybody, including God, has the motive of gaining an advantage. Our model is Jesus Christ, who had a self motive even in His death on the cross. The author of Hebrews says, *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2, *emphasis mine*). Nobody has the Santa Claus virtue, "to be good for goodness sake." We give because giving rewards our new self. Since God is sovereign and good (by definition), we gain when He gains. God's gain is the display of His own glory. Neither God nor His glory change, but the awareness of Him can change. In other words, God's profit motive is the spread of His own righteous character. So our only hope for gain is to glorify God. Anything else only seems like gain, but it results in loss.

There Are Two Common Perversions of the Profit Motive which Must Be Avoided: Selfishness and Short-term Gratification

(1) Pursue Selfness Not Selfishness

One common perversion of selfness is selfishness. Selfishness is exercising my self-interest at the expense of others. Selfishness is a perversion of self-interest. For example, you would not object if I was hungry and ate some bread. That is self-interest. But you might object if it's the only bread, and you are also hungry and I eat it all. In that case, I would be fulfilling my self-interest at your expense. That's selfishness.

Selfness = the profit motive (a hope for gain and a fear of loss) given to us by God.

Selfishness = satisfying my self-interest by taking away from the profit of others.

Selfishness is only possible when we compete for earthly resources. Since God's resources are unlimited, pursuing that which He rewards is never selfish because it never takes away from rewards available to others.

Sin is always something that was originally good which has gone bad. Selfishness is the profit motive gone bad. It's a perversion of selfness. Evil is always a perversion of good. If I have a broken arm, I must first have an arm—a good arm. Selfness is like a good arm. Selfishness is when the arm is broken. Selfishness is not possible without selfness, but it perverts it by stealing from someone else's selfness.

(2) Pursue Long-term Not Short-term Selfness

A second perversion of selfness is to pursue it with short-term thinking. Long-term thinking delays rewards. Sacrifice, for example, is not a violation of selfness but a delay in its gratification. Sacrifice is when I give up the present for the future. The further into the future I plan my reward, the more it will profit me and the greater the virtue. For example, if I discipline my children in the ways of the Bible so that they will look good to my friends in church on Sunday—that's short-term gratification and is of very little (if any) value. It's like the Pharisees praying on the streetcorner to be heard by men. Jesus said they have their reward. They have been paid in full! But if I discipline my children so that I can see them become responsible adults some day—that's better. I have now put off my reward until later. Nonetheless, I will realize it this side of the grave, so it's pretty shallow. But if I discipline my children so that I will be rewarded for it in heaven—that's the ultimate virtue because I have put off my gain, my profit, my reward, as far as possible.

Satan and our sin nature will always tell us to sacrifice the future for the present

God and our new nature will always tell us to sacrifice the present for the future

So when I say your involvement in a conflict is to change yourself, I do not mean it in an altruistic way. That's a myth. You should change yourself because (a) it is eternally good for you to change yourself and (b) because you are the only one you can change. Self-change is the only way to participate in the resolution of the conflict. It's the way to profit from the conflict, and eternal profit should be your goal. But remember, anything that appears profitable which: (1) comes at some other person's expense or (2) looks short-term for gratification, is a lie. It's not truly in your eternal interest because it leaves God (and vertical thinking) out.

The biblical way to resolve conflict is to look at the situation vertically not horizontally. You must see the situation as a conflict between yourself and God. Since you and God are the only two having the real conflict, who do you think should change?

Here's a Situation

A husband and wife see each other's roles very differently. The husband believes the wife should stay at home and make raising the children her focus. She believes he should be more involved with raising the children, allowing her to pursue a career, which currently brings in more money than his. Each believes they are right and that the solution is for the other to change their perspective. This has become a personal conflict which threatens their marriage.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
Some compromise is needed here. Each spouse needs to tolerate the other's point of view. The husband needs to allow the wife to pursue a career, and she needs to allow him to pursue his, even if he makes less money. Both must share equally in raising the children. This can be a win-win situation if they both think about what their basic values are.	Since both have a personal conflict, both have a conflict with God. Hence both need to focus on changing themselves. They need to thank God for the challenge, forgive the other person, and ask themselves, "What am I doing and what have I done to cause my spouse to react this way?" (Matthew 7:3-5). Neither should ask, "How can we work out a win-win deal or a compromise?" nor "How can I get my spouse to change?" but rather, "How can I change myself to be what God wants me to be in this situation?"

Chapter 8

Getting on their Side of the Wall

Viewing the Conflict Together

Jesus said, *If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering* (Matthew 5:23-24; see also 1 Corinthians 4:13).

This passage is in the context of being angry with someone (verses 21-22). Jesus said anyone angry enough to call his brother a fool is guilty enough to go to hell. In other words, one's anger with his brother is a conflict with God. It's basically a vertical problem.

Jesus does not say if you have something against your brother go confess it to him but rather if you *remember that your brother has something against you* (verse 23) go resolve it with him.

If you are angry with your brother, that must be dealt with by first confessing it to God. But if you realize that your brother has something against you, your priority is to *first be reconciled to your brother*. This means going to the one who has something against you to help them resolve their conflict with God. This also means you will allow them to reveal the sins you've committed that contributed to whatever they have against you so that the two of you can be reconciled to God, then to each other. Since you are also a sinner, you can assume you have contributed to the conflict. In other words, if it went to court (before God), you would be guilty, too (verses 25-26).

It seems that if I am aware of a conflict my brother has with me, Christ expects me to go to my brother with the purpose of reconciling with my brother. But how do I do that? Should I try to straighten him out? Negotiate a win/win deal, compromise, or what?

As I said earlier, we should never attempt to resolve a conflict in a way which requires the performance of someone else to change. But we should also help the other person determine how his or her performance should change.

The challenge is to disciple them, help them, encourage them, and allow them the opportunity to take ownership of the truth, not dictate a change in their behavior.

People will generally set up a conflict scenario as a wall, with them on one side of the wall and you on the other. The wall is the conflict, and it separates the two of you. They view the wall from their side; you see it from your side. The wall looks different from each side, but in both cases, it's a wall, and the wall tends to get higher (or thicker or something) the more each one looks at it from their own side.

What's needed is vertical thinking. That means not looking at the wall from your side or their side but struggling together to see what it looks like from God's side—the top. There are several things you can do with the wall:

1. You Can Build It Bigger and Have Conflict Forever. Sometimes this is necessary. Martin Luther had no good option to building a wall between himself (and what became Lutheran Protestantism) and the pope (and ultimately the Roman Catholic Church). Their conflict was not resolvable. Either salvation was by grace through faith alone (Luther) or it included good works defined by the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church (the pope). Neither could compromise, so the conflict was inevitable and unresolvable. It still is!

2. You Can Walk Away and Ignore It. Sometimes this is also a good idea. For example, sometimes you will simply agree to disagree. You both conclude that the conflict is unresolvable. Neither of you are able or willing to dismantle the wall. Your integrity does not allow you to dismantle it, but neither do you

wish to build it bigger. With this in mind, you each climb the wall from your own side, shake hands at the top, then return to your own position on your own side of the wall. This is one way to “first be reconciled to your brother.” Historically, a good example of this was George Whitefield and John Wesley. Whitefield and Wesley were both leaders of the Great Awakening in England during the 1700s, but Whitefield was a Calvinist and Wesley was Armenian. They couldn’t resolve their differences, so they separated their ministries. They remained friends but maintained separate ministries.

Both building the wall and walking away from the wall are possible, and sometimes necessary, ways to handle the conflict. But neither of them are an attempt to resolve the conflict. The two above scenarios are both a decision to not resolve the conflict. So we should only use them as a last resort. Whether we strengthen the wall or walk away from the wall—the wall still exists. As long as there is a wall: (1) we are sacrificing (something of) our relationship with the other person, (2) we are losing an opportunity to change ourself, and (3) we are missing an occasion to glorify God by resolving the conflict. So whenever possible, we should move around the wall and look at it from the same side.

3. You Can Move Around the Wall. Our objective, as the one who is attempting to resolve the conflict, is not to see it from their side or get them to see it from our side—that’s the horizontal worldly solution, of say, Covey. Our task is to bring God’s perspective to their side. If the other person is a believer, we could say something like, “How do you think we should deal with this passage in the Bible which seems to contradict what you want (or what you say)?” or “Am I missing something here? Am I reading this passage incorrectly? It sounds to me like it says this. Am I wrong? If not, don’t we have to figure out together a way to conform to it?” Even if the other person is an unbeliever, you can help him see that you see it that way.

The point is, you are not dictating your views. You are relating God’s views. You both have the same problem—the violation of God’s standards. If what they are doing is sinful, then it’s not just a problem between them and God because you, as a believer, have a responsibility before God to deal with it. You are not the judge, you did not create the standard being broken, and it was not your idea that such a problem needed to be dealt with. God decided all that. You are just in the place where your own eternal rewards depend on your attending to the situation, just as theirs do. Here are a few examples:

Suppose your conflict is with a professing believer committing adultery, fornication, or homosexuality. You might say something like, “I realize you are physically or emotionally affirmed by this, but what do we do with passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, which says, ... *neither fornicators ... nor adulterers, ... nor homosexuals ... will inherit the kingdom of God*? What should we do about the fact that Paul calls those things “unrighteousness”?

Suppose your conflict is with one of your teenagers who has ungodly friends who you feel are leading them in the wrong direction. You might say, “What should we do with the fact that the Bible says, *Bad company corrupts good morals*?” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Suppose you have a spouse or a business partner who wants to go into debt to buy a bigger house, a newer car, or expand the business. You can say, “I understand their value, but what do we do with biblical statements which seem to prohibit debt?” (Proverbs 3:27-28; 6:1-5; 11:15; 22:26-27; Romans 13:8).

Now I’m not suggesting these answers will immediately dissolve the wall. What they will do is focus the attention on God’s Word instead of each of your opinions. It should (if you keep insisting on it) result in more Bible study, looking at the context and exploring the Scripture for other passages. We should ask questions like: What does the Bible teach us about the heart of God in this issue?

*What if we ask ourselves not “What we can I get away with?”
but “How can we do what delights the heart of God?”*

So a key element in resolving conflict is seeing the conflict as a wall which must be breached. But this must be done vertically. The point is not to see the wall from their side or help them to see it from our side (although both may be a helpful part of the process). The point is to explore God’s perspective together from His side—the top. Look at the wall together as a common problem and explore the question, “What is the heart of God in this issue?”

Here's a Situation

A teenage girl wants to go to a rock concert. Her parents check out the performer and the music and find it, though not explicitly Satanic, far beyond what Christians should be listening to. The girl wants to go because all her friends are going. This becomes a wall between her and her parents.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
The parents need to listen to the words of the music and determine if they are appropriate. If there is explicit sex or violence or profanity, the girl should not be allowed to go—the parents explaining why to the teen. If the words are not beyond the parents' standard, then the girl should be allowed to go. Music itself is not good or bad, so just because it is not what parents are used to isn't significant. The important thing is, do the words violate the standards the parents have laid down for the home?	The parents should say to the girl something like, "Let's listen to the words of this rock group together. Let's write them down and talk about them with your brothers and sisters and maybe even with other Christian friends. Then we'll look at what the Bible says about those same subjects. We shall try to determine together if these are lyrics God prefers us to listen to. Music, per se, isn't good or bad, but it does bring out certain emotions, and it is usually mentally connected to certain habit patterns (see Ephesians 5:18-20). Does this music bring out feelings and habit patterns which are close to the heart of God? Based on this, you decide whether or not to go."

Chapter 9

Turning the Other Cheek

Foregoing Justice

The Mosaic Law had specific ways of dealing with conflict, all of which could be put under the title of justice. After He listed a host of specifics, God said to Moses, *But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise* (Exodus 21:23-25, see also Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21). A just law will always force a payback from the injuring party to the injured party. These are not crimes against the state but against the injured party, and they should be paid back to the other person. A just law seeks justice.

Since Israel's law was dictated by God, all violations were also against Him. There was no separation between religion and state, and all conflicts were to be resolved with justice as defined by God and carried out by the state.

But Jesus had a different approach to resolving conflict. During what is traditionally called the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus gave six lessons where He said, *You have heard ... but I say to you*. One of them deals with the aspect of the law. He said, *You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you* (Matthew 5:38-42, see also Luke 6:29-30). In Luke 6:30 He adds, *... and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back*.

Paul echoed this principle when he wrote, *Why not rather be wronged, why not rather be defrauded* (1 Corinthians 6:7), that is, instead of seeking a lawsuit against a brother (verses 1-6).

Christ's general principle seems to be

Do not resist an evil person

Jesus is not contradicting or violating the Mosaic Law. When God spoke to Moses, He gave him a law for governing the people of Israel nationally. When Jesus spoke to His disciples, He gave them instructions for dealing with the people of the upcoming church who would be living in different nations under different governments all over the world.

Here are a few general observations pertinent to applying this passage:

(1) The administration of justice is not neglected or negated by turning the other cheek. Instead, justice is relegated to a function of God and government (Romans 13:1, 1 Timothy 2:2, 1 Peter 2:13-14).

(2) During this church age, we (the church) are a collection of individuals not a governing institution that competes with the state, becomes the state, or replaces the state as a judging authority. The church has the authority to (a) preach (1 Corinthians 9:23), (b) discern right and wrong (1 Corinthians 6:1-8), (c) teach the Word of God (Titus 2:15), and (d) disobey those who command us to not do so (Acts 4:19-20). But we (the church) are not to carry out justice (an eye for an eye) with one another. As Paul put it, we have *authority, which the Lord gave, for building you up and not for destroying you* (2 Corinthians 10:8, also 13:10). Even church excommunication is not a punishment or judgment. It is not carrying out the judgment of a governing authority. Excommunication is an act of love for the erring brother or sister in Christ as a result of our responsibility toward one another in hopes of his or her repentance and return to fellowship. So the response of every believer in our church age, whether individually or corporately, is to turn the other cheek when personally wronged.

(3) Turning the other cheek has to do with personal injury of my own person or property, not that of others. If someone rapes one of my daughters, I'm not obligated to give them my other daughter to rape. If someone steals my neighbor's property, I'm not told to give him more of my neighbor's property.

(4) Turning the other cheek does not mean I'm to interrupt or thwart the governmental function of justice. If someone attempts to murder me, fails and is prosecuted by the state for attempted murder, I'm not to refuse to give testimony in court as evidence for his guilt. That would be to interfere with the law of the land. But if he is found innocent, I'm not to sue him for something or other.

(5) Turning the other cheek does mean I am willing to suffer short-term loss (earthly rewards) for long-term profit (heavenly rewards). Peter tells us, *Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ... while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously* (1 Peter 2:21-23). *not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead* (1 Peter 3:9).

Therefore, we must conclude that the carrying out of justice—the judgment of wrongdoing via an eye for an eye—is a function of God and government (Romans 13:1-4). That is what Christ told the individual **not** to do (Matthew 7:1). Since the church is a collective term for individual believers, we must not execute judgment. Therefore in this church age,

Believers must turn the other cheek because not to do so is to assume the role of God or government

Here's a Situation

A family has owned and lived on a piece of land for several generations. A developer buys the land next to them and claims he owns a strip of land on his edge of their property which cuts their driveway in half. This is because modern survey lines contradict the old property line established in the late 1800s by a fence and a line of trees. The father of the family and the developer meet and agree to a compromise, but later the developer reneges on his agreement, puts iron stakes down the center of the driveway, and has his lawyer write a letter stating the piece of land is his. Animosity develops between the developer and the family.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
<p>The law says that if someone lives on a piece of land over seven years and no one protests it, the land is theirs. Since this family has lived on the land all their lives, they have a legitimate claim to the driveway. Obviously, the original survey made in the late 1800s was off, and no one protested it. The family should, therefore, take the matter to court and force the developer to move back his survey line and take the stakes out of their driveway.</p>	<p>Both Jesus (Matthew 5:25-26) and Paul (1 Corinthians 6:1-11) warn against taking someone to court. Lawsuits focus on people, this life, and earthly possessions. They demand our time, our thought life, and our emotional energy, while they feed lawyers and create hatred. No one's life or well-being is at stake here. Christ's <i>turn-the-other-cheek</i> teaching (Matthew 5:38-42) requires the family to drop the issue and move the driveway, thus giving the strip of land to the developer.</p>

Chapter 10

III. Biblical Intervention on Personal Conflict

If you live on planet earth, you have conflicts. Autonomous beings, by the very nature of their individual existence, will come into conflict with one another. When some other autonomous being invades your space, you have a conflict. There are basically two responses to conflict: avoid it or deal with it.

If we decide to avoid conflict, we may do so by denying it exists or running away from it. Denial is dishonesty. It encourages us to create and live in a phoney world which makes us less and less capable of dealing with ourselves and more and more of a burden to those around us.

Running away from conflict could take the form of quitting a job, leaving a church, getting a divorce, or committing suicide. We may determine we cannot resolve a conflict, but we should never decide to run away from it or deny it exists. Avoiding conflict is not the way of the biblical peacemaker. The biblical mandate is to deal with it, not avoid it.

If we decide to deal with our conflict, there are two ways to do that—vertically or horizontally. If we deal with conflict horizontally, we will be doing what the world does. This basically leaves God out. You may insert some biblical principles into your method, but the reality is you are just using God rather than serving Him.

If you deal with conflict vertically, then you are serving God. The question is not who is getting the glory—in the end, God will get the glory either way. The question is, are you going to participate in the glory of God?

Dealing with conflict vertically does not mean we ignore the other person. Quite the opposite. It means we deal with both ourselves and the other person. But it also means we do it in the context of the glory of God, the will of God, the commandments of God, and the love of God.

The most descriptive procedural passage for dealing with the other person is probably Matthew 18:15-17. The passage has four parts. We shall discuss them here, then in the next chapter give practical suggestions for their application.

(1) *If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother* (Matthew 18:15). [The *King James Version* and the *New International Version* add the words “against you” after “sins.” But these words are not found in the “earliest and best witnesses” (B 0281 f¹ Sahadic et al ii, *Net Bible* comment, p. 54) and are considered “doubtful” by *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, p. 238. Even if the words were to be included, the context does not permit an interpretation which would restrict this to a conflict with someone who sins “against you.” Also, sin “against you,” if it were in the text, would have to be understood as the fallout of sin against God, since all sin is ultimately against God (Psalm 51:4). The preceding context is that of dealing with one who has “gone astray” (verses 12-14) and the following context deals with the apostles’ responsibility over the church, not personal conflicts with one another.]

So the point of this passage is to command the brother who is not sinning, in this particular instance, to initiate a resolution to a conflict caused by a brother who is sinning, in some particular instance. The “brother” would be a believer, but it would be a believer you know well enough to be somehow networked into his life. Obviously you cannot be initiating conflict resolution among every sinning believer you ever hear about. This procedure would be for believers who are part of your network of relationships.

The initial emphasis is to intervene privately. No one should be involved but you and the one you believe to be sinning. You may be wrong. You may have misread the situation or misunderstood. However, if he is sinning, he needs an opportunity to face it and change his mind (repent) privately. I suspect most conflicts would be resolved at this level if this were followed. It almost never is.

The goal is to restore the sinning brother to God and to fellowship with other believers (the church) with the attitude of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1-2).

(2) *But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed* (Matthew 18:16). The purpose of this second stage is to confirm the facts. Christ uses the precedent set in the Mosaic Law, namely that facts are confirmed by hearing two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). The situation here is that the sinning brother did not listen in the sense that he (1) refused to stop sinning, (2) disagreed about your facts, or (3) had a different interpretation of those facts. In other words, your suspicions about him were neither relieved nor confirmed. You aren't satisfied that he is innocent, and he is not repentant. Now others must be involved to bring in more information to confirm one or the other of you as false.

The sin must be defined clearly enough on biblical lines that it can be either confirmed or denied. Either you are wrong or he is wrong or you are both wrong, but you should never describe it in such a way that you can both be right. Never define it as a win-win situation.

The sin must be biblically prohibited. You cannot hold someone to your standards of social conservatism or traditional values. Only biblical standards are relevant here. Don't accuse someone of "what this might lead to." You can never know that, and it's not relevant. Clear biblical commands must have been broken. Also remember, you are never to evaluate his motives. Only his actions are relevant. Motives are God's business.

Suppose, for example, you accuse a brother of drunkenness. Do not accuse him of drinking because no matter what you think about it, it's not biblically prohibited. Drunkenness is (Galatians 5:21). But suppose he disagrees that he was drunk. Then others must be brought in to confirm that. Remember, it's the Bible, not other brothers in Christ, that dictates the sin. No matter how many brothers you can find to confirm the fact that he drinks alcoholic beverages, it's not relevant since the Bible never prohibits it. The Bible alone defines the sin. Other brothers only confirm the sin when it is indeed sin.

(3) *And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church* (Matthew 18:17a). If it is determined by the initiator plus two or three other witnesses that the brother is indeed sinning, yet he refuses to listen, then it should be told to the church. The point is, these three or four brothers could still be wrong. They may be legalistically insisting on prohibiting activity that the Bible does not condemn. They may be judging his motives instead of his actions. If the matter is brought to the church, false accusations are less likely to fly. The church as a larger group will be able to confirm or deny the facts. Also, if it is taken to the church, then there is a well-thought-out serious commitment on both sides. Both are committed to their perspectives and willing to make a case for it, or the sinner is flat out unwilling to repent.

The difficult issue here is to determine "what is the church?" Obviously Jesus was speaking to the apostles before the New Testament church was created, so the question is, what is He referring to?

I suggest He is using the word "church" (Greek, *ecclesia*) in the exact same way it is used throughout the rest of the New Testament. The church is, in its most basic definition, a plural word for believers (Colossians 1:18). The church might manifest itself in a lot of ways, but at its core, it's believers. So locally or specifically in a given situation, the church is a network of believers who flow in and out of each other's lives. Christ, I believe, is referring here not to some institution but to the plurality of believers significant to the brother accused of sin. As the *Expositor's Greek Testament* says, the church is "the brotherhood of believers in Christ" (Vol. 1, p. 240).

(4) *and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer* (Matthew 18:17b). The final step in conflict resolution is to excommunicate the sinner from fellowship. This is not a punishment for sin. Punishment is always up to God. This is a loving act which does the best good for the sinner by giving him an opportunity to realize that all his Christian brothers disagree with his actions. It turns him over to Satan's world in hopes that he will repent and see the contrast between his actions and those of believers. All business, social, and religious association with such a one must be cut off so this can be effective. Paul says not even to eat with such a one. This is not just eating the Lord's Supper, as some have claimed, but eating in the context of associating with him (1 Corinthians 5:11).

The reason for excommunication is also to make a statement of purity before God. Excommunication does, of course, include the Lord's Supper meal. Paul says unrepentant sinners should not be allowed to participate in worship with other believers in order to demonstrate "sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Also, it is to isolate sin from other believers because otherwise it may spread and contaminate. *Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?* (1 Corinthians 5:6). A good example of this is the great amount of divorce and remarriage that has permeated the church because we haven't intervened.

Here's a Situation

A prominent church member is also the principle of a local public high school. Because of pressure from liberal organizations and threats of lawsuits, the principle decided to take down a plaque of the Ten Commandments which has been prominently displayed in the corridor since the school was founded in 1896. Many of his fellow local church members and their ancestors graduated from that school, having daily observed the Ten Commandments' plaque. First one, then several church members, furious over this, have talked with him about it. But the principle refused to put the plaque back up. A conflict has arisen over this in the church.

How would you resolve this situation? [Assume all these people are Christians.]

A Worldly Solution Horizontal Thinking	A Biblical Solution Vertical Thinking
<p>People have already gone to the principle individually, so a small group must clarify all the facts. If the principle refuses to return the plaque to its place, the matter should be brought before his local church. A vote of the local church should then determine if this plaque should be put back up. The church should require the principle to abide by the ruling or face excommunication because so many in the church have been offended by his actions.</p>	<p>People have already gone to the principle individually. So a small group must clarify all the facts. Those should include: (1) people in the church who have been offended with the plaque up, (2) others in the community who are offended, (3) the plaque was in a public school not a church or a private home, (4) there is nothing in the Bible that commands or suggests the Ten Commandments should be placed in public buildings, (5) the Ten Commandments are primarily Jewish—most Christians don't keep a Saturday Sabbath, (6) the presence of the plaque opens the door for Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim plaques as well. The principle should abide by the advice of a group of his mature friends (his real church) not his emotionally-based institutional church (3 John 9–11).</p>

Appendix A

Dealing with Conflict Personally

In Matthew 18, Jesus outlined four stages of dealing with personal conflict. A. *go ... in private*, B. *take one or two more with you*, C. *tell it to the church*, D. *let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer*.

Here are some practical suggestions I have found helpful in following the Matthew 18 procedure:

A. *And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother* (Matthew 18:15).

1. Meet in a private place. A public place (like a restaurant or home where others might be listening) does not allow the accused brother an opportunity to look seriously at the issue. [I will use the masculine only so I don't have to keep saying he or she, but the advice applies equally to either sex.]
2. Tell him only what you have personally experienced via your observations or your conversations with him. If your information comes from someone else, that someone else needs to go to him first and only involve you if it cannot be resolved between the two of them. This is almost never followed. Nonetheless, when you discover it being neglected, insist it be reinstated at that point. [Some small pieces of information coming from others might be brought up if the other person is aware of your use of the information and them as a source of it. Such information should then only be presented with all sources revealed to the accused person.]
3. Don't let him change the subject by attacking you. It's common for him to say something like: "Yeah, well, look who's talking. I've heard you say ..." or "I've seen you do" Tell him that if you are involved in sinful activity, then you appreciate his bringing it up to you, and you would be open to discussing that at a future time. But your guilt or innocence of a similar (or other) thing is not relevant here. Let's stick with the observation at hand. This is not a faultfinding contest.
4. Do not let this be a general attack on his character. You might begin and end by telling him his assets and positive qualities which you respect. Only deal with one item (one sinful issue). If there are others—whether yours or his—they are not relevant for this session. [By the way, you are talking about real biblically defined sins, aren't you? Remember, drinking, use of tobacco, frequency of church attendance, dancing, etc. are not biblically described sins.]

Don't evaluate people based on your expectations of them

5. Let him know this is not a personal thing but simply an issue of your responsibility before God. Paul said, *Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ* (Galatians 6:1-2).
6. Give him time to think about it and work on it. Meet several times if necessary. If he is willing to work on it or even explore the possibility that he may indeed be sinning and need to change, leave it at this individual level.

B. *But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed* (Matthew 18:16).

1. Only bring others along when the sinning brother (a) refuses to admit he is doing what you are accusing him of or (b) refuses to admit what he is doing is wrong or (c) simply does not change his mind or actions.
2. The purpose of bringing along others is to confirm the facts. All facts should be explored. There should be no secrets, no issues that somebody told somebody but told them not to tell anybody. Never let people tell you things about someone else which you aren't supposed to tell others—that's participation in gossip. If it's relevant to their case, then everybody who needs to know should know. Play this with all the cards face up. [It is certainly legitimate for someone to tell you something about themselves which they do not want you to tell others—but not something about someone else.]
3. Don't judge motives. Your purpose is fact-finding, not motive-judging. The issue is **what** he did, **not why** he did it. Whatever you believe his motives to be, it is not relevant. The question is not why he did it but did he do something disapproved in the Bible.

4. Tell those at this small gathering that although we are going to reveal everything we know about this case here, we are not going to talk about it elsewhere. The purpose of this session is to give the sinning brother an opportunity to admit, change, and rectify the problem. Gossip will only work against that.
 5. Allow enough time to discuss the issue thoroughly. Don't just do it at lunchtime or some other confined time when people need to leave soon.
 6. Give the sinning brother time to change. Schedule future meetings with this group or some parts of this group if that is deemed helpful.
 7. If the sinning brother refuses to meet with the two or three (very often the case), they should each meet with him, then meet together to decide if they understand whether he is willing to change. If not, they need to progress to the next step.
- C. *And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church* (Matthew 18:17a).
1. The church should be a gathering of as large a group of his relevant believer friends and contacts as reasonably possible. It does not need to be a local church congregation unless those people are his closest associates (which is probably only true in a small town).
 2. Never define the church organizationally. The purpose of this gathering is to consider excommunication. Organizational excommunications simply allow the sinner to avoid the organization or join one down the street. The church must be defined as the network of his closest friends and associates in Christ from which it is a real tragedy to be separated.
 3. The sinning brother may (most likely, will) refuse to attend this gathering of the church. So be it. He should be encouraged to come, but there is nothing in Matthew 18 that requires his attendance.
- D. *and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer* (Matthew 18:17b).
1. This is a social excommunication not an opportunity for friendship evangelism. Jesus is not saying to befriend him as the unbelieving tax gatherer who you are evangelizing but to treat him as the Jews treated Gentiles and tax gatherers—they avoided them.
 2. This is personal avoidance not just disallowing him to be a member of an organization or an assembly. Paul says, *But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one* (1 Corinthians 5:11).
 3. The purpose of excommunication is not punishment but restoration. It's a last ditch effort of love for the brother. It's doing the best good we can do for him as a final hope that he will see his sin and repent.
 4. Remember, excommunication is only for the unrepentant. Any believer who repents to the brothers (and confesses to God) should always be restored to fellowship.

Appendix B

Dealing with Conflict as a Mediator

During the process described in Appendix A, someone, maybe you, will be called upon to be the mediator of the conflict. As a mediator, you are not a decision maker. Your role is (1) to make sure everything is done decently and in order, (2) that all the relevant information is explored, (3) that everyone gets an adequate opportunity to present their case, (4) and that a decision is reached.

Mediation, Arbitration, and Litigation

Mediation is part of the second step of Matthew 18 as described in Appendix A. It is the occasion where other witnesses are brought in, that every fact may be confirmed. The next step should be either repentance or a recommendation to the church for excommunication. But before that step can be pursued, we must first be sure the accused brother is actually breaking a biblical prescription that's the reason for mediation. There are two other common methods for conflict resolution, neither of which are recommended in the Bible. Here is a comparison between them:

Mediation

(taught in the Bible)

- more informal format
- the final decision is left up to the individuals or forwarded to the church

- spiritual matters are central
- material matters are peripheral
- the conflict is viewed as between people and God

Arbitration

(not mentioned in the Bible)

- more formal format
- the final decision is made by one or more arbitrators, it is either agreed to or moved to a litigator

- spiritual matters are peripheral
- material matters are significant
- the conflict is viewed as between two people

Litigation

(forbidden in the Bible, for believers)

- legal format
- the final decision is made by a court of law, it is binding and enforced by the state

- spiritual matters are irrelevant
- material matters are central
- the conflict is between people as dictated by the law

The Role of the Mediator

1. *Face the conflict vertically not horizontally*

Remind everyone that this conflict, like all personal conflict, is basically between us and God not between each other. The Bible never says we should define a conflict as between two people. We should encourage people to pursue a right solution before God. Those things should be briefly outlined by the mediator. (I emphasize briefly—don't talk too much or too long.)

2. *Define the conflict as one person desiring to help another person involved in sinful activity*

The Bible never commands mediation between two legitimate differences or two people who can't get along. Do not describe the conflict as "a mistake," "an error in judgment," or "a conflict of interests" because those things are not necessarily sin. To do that assumes, as the world does, that each person has an independent valid set of self-determined values which from their point of view have been violated. The Bible describes conflict as a situation where one person sees another person violating God's values and is willing to love that person enough to point it out.

Notice the context of the Matthew 18 formula: *Thus it is not {the} will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. And if your brother sins ...* (verses 14-15a). The situation is not two brothers in a conflict with each other but one pointing out a sin in another. In a context of not letting anyone perish, Jesus says if you see a brother heading in that direction, go to him *and show him his fault* in private, then with others, then the church.

The same is true in the case of the adultery of 1 Corinthians 5. Paul does not see it as a conflict between he and the adulterous brother but as pointing out the sin of that brother (verse 1-5). When Paul challenged Peter for not eating with Gentile believers, Paul did not see it as a conflict between he and Peter. He saw it as a sin of Peter. He says, *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned* (Galatians 2:11). When the Apostle John challenged Diotrephes, John did not describe it as a conflict between he and Diotrephes but as pointing out the sin of Diotrephes (3 John 10). Jesus did not have a conflict with the Pharisees, He pointed out their sin (Matthew 23). John the Baptist did not have a conflict with Herod, he pointed out his sin (Mark 6:18). Peter did not have a conflict with Simon the magician, he pointed out his sin (Acts 8:20). Paul did not describe conflicts as two brothers who have a legitimate disagreement. He said, *Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness* (Galatians 6:1).

3. *Stay on relevant issues*

This was covered in Appendix A as well. I will only repeat it here because it will happen every time, and it is also relevant when you are a mediator. Don't let people get into (what they call in East Tennessee a "spitting contest") pointing out one another's faults. "You should talk. Look what you are involved in ...," "Who are you to judge, you do ...," "Yeah, but everybody knows you are ..." are all illegitimate side trails. If the person making the accusation also has sins, the accused person should be invited to bring them up on another occasion if he feels he can help his brother in those areas. But right now the question is the sin at hand not those other ones.

4. Focus on the goal of confession, forgiveness, and restoration

Here are some ways to do that: (1) Set the tone for this by confessing your own sins to God specifically. Before you enter the session, acknowledge your general sinfulness to the group. (2) Do not leave especially awkward issues until the end of the sessions. This prevents confessions, forgiveness, and restoration since the awkward thing may describe the issue best. Leaving it until the end does not give people time to talk, think, and respond to it. (3) Don't take the side of the person doing the accusing or the one being accused. Taking sides assumes the issue is between the two people rather than between all of us and God. Explore the issue to determine the truth not as on one side or the other. (4) Give both time to think. Take a break or have a private session with each party if you feel it will be helpful. (5) Do not attempt to resolve the issue by compromise, splitting the difference, or pursuing a win-win idea. That eliminates the confession-forgiveness-restoration objective. The question is: "Are there sins to be confessed?" not "Can we ignore the sins to resolve the personal conflict?" Once again, resolving the conflict between two people is to be described in terms of resolving their conflicts with God.

5. If an agreement cannot be reached, discuss the process by which an agreement might be reached

The goal is: *By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed* (Matthew 18:16b). If you reach a deadlock concerning the truth of certain facts, then discuss the process by which those facts may be confirmed. For example, if a man disagrees that he is flirting with his secretary, what process might we go through to confirm or deny this? What other witnesses might have observed this? Or suppose there is disagreement over whether or not a contractor did or did not do certain things in a building project. What objective experts could be brought in to inspect the project to see if it is so? Or if a person disagrees that he is lying, are there others who might confirm this?

6. Point out that this conflict should be resolved without litigation if at all possible

Paul wrote, *Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say (this) to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?* (1 Corinthians 6:1-7). It's better to be defrauded than to go to court. Going to court is usually an admission of failure to be willing to be defrauded. We should point out to those involved in this session of mediation that this is not some optional meeting to be gotten out of the way so we can keep our Christian brothers happy or so the conflicting people can offer the excuse, "Well, I tried to resolve it out of court." Biblically, the issues must be resolved here. Either we will conclude the accused person is not guilty of a sin and the accuser was mistaken, or he is guilty of sin and must repent or be taken before his church for excommunication.

7. Recommend church excommunication when there is clear unrepentant sin

The most painful job of a mediator is to recognize that there clearly is sin on the part of the one accused and that he refuses to acknowledge his actions as sin. John writes, *The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4). When such a case exists, the biblical directive is clear. Jesus said, *And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer* (Matthew 18:17). Paul defines that as follows: *In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

Keep in mind that every act of the conflict resolution process is to love God and love our brother—God first, then our brother. So our context is vertical—How do we love God? Then out of that we love our brother. If he refuses to repent, to confess his sin when there is a clear biblically described sin being committed, then the final loving act is to refuse him fellowship in the church (his network of Christian friends). This is an act of delivering *such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit*

may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. The act of excommunication is an act of love. Remember, love is always defined as doing the best good for the other person. The excommunication decision is a removal of fellowship with the hope that he will return to Jesus Christ. The hope is that while he is in the far country of the world he will return to God (Luke 15:11-24).

Appendix C

The Difference between Secular Counseling and Discipleship

Appendix C does not deal with physiological problems such as brain disease, chemical imbalance, or physically-caused personality disorders. The purpose here is to compare secular counseling for social, personal, and relational issues to biblical discipleship.

In general, the differences listed below explore the idea that secular counseling is people helping people to overcome distress and bring them into a comfort zone. This is done through applying information outside the Bible and used alone or mixed with biblical truth. This is a reactive process.

Biblical discipleship, however, is God helping people to glorify Himself through their life situation. This is a proactive process.

- (1) In *secular counseling*, people, representing the wisdom of people, counsel people.
In **discipleship**, God uses people, representing His wisdom, to counsel people (Psalm 23:1-3; 32:8; 62:5; Isaiah 9:6).
- (2) *Secular counseling* sees problems as situations that need to be solved.
Discipleship sees problems as an introduction to the grace of God, which strengthens faith (1 Peter 1:6-7).
- (3) *Secular counseling* assumes earthly situations are responsible for suffering.
Discipleship assumes God is responsible for suffering (Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4).
- (4) *Secular counseling* focuses on analysis.
Discipleship focuses on answers (Matthew 10:38; 16:24).
- (5) *Secular counseling* says people need to find themselves.
Discipleship says people need to lose themselves for Christ's sake (Luke 9:23-24).
- (6) *Secular counseling* sees psychology as the basis of truth and may add Bible verses to reinforce psychological principles.
Discipleship uses the Bible as the basis of truth (Mark 7:7, 13).
- (7) *Secular counseling* helps people to get gratification in this life.
Discipleship helps people to get rewards in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).
- (8) *Secular counseling* pursues being at peace with the world.
Discipleship pursues separation from the world according to the truth of God's Word (John 17:15-17).
- (9) *Secular counseling* says all truth is God's truth. Therefore, we should not throw out human wisdom just because it's not found in the Bible.
Discipleship is determined to know nothing more than the Bible knows (Psalm 119:97-105; John 8:31-33). So how would we know something else is true or relevant?
- (10) *Secular counseling* includes freeing people from the feeling of guilt.
Discipleship says we are all guilty and need repentance (Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- (11) *Secular counseling* sees problems as horizontal—between people.
Discipleship sees problems as vertical—between people and God (Psalm 51:1-4).
- (12) *Secular counseling* integrates experiential evidence with Scripture.
Discipleship sees the Bible alone as sufficient (Matthew 16:6; Ephesians 4:17-18).
- (13) *Secular counseling* believes the problems of the modern world are too complex to restrict them to biblical answers alone.
Discipleship believes there is nothing new under the sun for which the Bible is not sufficient (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).