

1. The first category of conflicts is those that have to do with differentness (116).

The solution for these conflicts, therefore, is not primarily some form of confrontation about the other person's sin, but rather the application of loving forbearance. What does this look like? For one thing, it follows the seven elements of forbearance defined in chapter 4. It seeks to put the other person's interests ahead of one's own. It dies to self (and to one's own desires and expectations). It is willing to yield to the wishes of another and to put up with differences of opinion and annoying idiosyncrasies for love's sake and for the cause of Christ. It may want to discuss the matter, not with the goal of restoring a sinning brother, but rather to see if a compromise may be reached, in order to determine for whom the issue is a swing issue and for whom it is a fire issue. (119)

1. Remind yourself that God made the other person with his or her own unique personality for His own purposes (which probably have little to do with making life easier for you). (119)
2. Guard against legalistic and judgmental attitudes that raise non-sin issues to the level of sin. "I'm the standard, and if you are different from me, you are not the Christian you ought to be." This is the mind-set of those who make such rash judgments. (119)
3. Focus more on the interests of the other person than on your own interests. (120) Php. 2:3-4
4. Be reasonable (willing to yield to the views and desires of others). (120) Js 3:17-18
5. Be willing to put up with annoying traits of others. (120) 1 Cor. 13:4-7
6. Try to determine for whom it is a "swing" issue and for whom it is a "fire" issue – assign a number from 1-10 in terms of importance (120)
7. Allow the peace of Christ to be the referee (or umpire) of the conflict. (121) Col 3:15

2. The second and most common form of conflict is a conflict that has to do with sinfulness in one or both parties. (116)

Luke 17:1-4 – Author holds the Conditional/Transactional Forgiveness View: We are to confront our sinning brother with his sin in the hope that he will repent so that we will be able to offer him forgiveness. The verb means to rebuke, reprove, censure, and also speak seriously and warn in order to prevent an action or to bring it to an end. This is a command (an imperative) – it is not optional. The goal (or purpose) of this rebuke is to grant the sinning brother forgiveness: You are to rebuke your brother in the hope that he will repent and that you will therefore be able to let him know that you have forgiven him. (122) *This is a conflation of forgiveness and reconciliation. To refute this view, see Matthew 6:12; Mark 11:25; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13.

Gal. 6:1-2 – The goal (or purpose) of this passage is to restore a sinning brother to a place of usefulness. (122)

Matt. 18:15-16 – In a healthy church, biblical confrontations occur regularly, but they rarely become public because every effort is made to protect the privacy of every sinner in the family. In my church, when serious sin has occurred, people have routinely been restored with few (if any) of the leadership ever knowing about the problem. This is so because our people have been trained to follow the injunctions of Matthew 18:15–17, especially the privacy principle. Even among our elders, the mantra is “Keep the circle as small as you can for as long as you can.” The third conflict-resolution principle that we see in this passage has to do with our purpose (and even our motive) for initiating a conflict: to win or gain our brother. The idea is that, as a result of the confrontation, we win our brother over to our side (really, to God’s side) of the argument. But winning our brother involves more than winning the argument about his sin. It is possible to win the argument but lose your brother in the process. When one person sins against another, a breach in the relationship often occurs. The way that they relate to each other is changed. Something that they had between them – something of the intimacy they shared and valued – is lost. When the reproof is “heard” (effectively received), the breach in the relationship is restored – what was lost is regained or won back. (126-127)

1. Get the beam out of your own eye first. (127)
2. Be sure that what the other person has done really is a sin (that ought not to be overlooked). (128)
3. Examine your motives. (128)
4. Use biblical terminology when talking to others about their sin. (129)
5. Choose the right time. (129) Eph. 4:29
6. Choose the right words. (130) Prov. 15:28
7. Be sure that you maintain a gentle spirit throughout the discussion. (130)

3. The third category of conflict that we see in Scripture occurs when individuals have different views of what the Bible really says about a matter. (117)

The third category of conflict occurs when there is a difference of opinion about the righteous thing to do in a given situation or circumstance. One person believes that one course of action is best; the other person thinks there is another way to respond. Or one individual believes that one set of guiding scriptural principles apply, while the other individual is convinced that another guiding principle should trump the others. Basically, at the outset, both parties believe that their approaches to solving

the issue are right (or even very necessarily biblical). At the very least, one individual believes that his approach is better (wiser or more biblical) than the other's approach. (131)

1. Confess and seek forgiveness for any sinful words, actions, or attitudes that may have exacerbated the conflict up to this point. (132)
2. Try to express the problem from both perspectives. (132) Prov. 18:2, 13
3. Determine what things can be agreed upon. (133)
4. Search the Scriptures for any biblical directives and/or principles that relate to resolving the issue. (133)
5. In light of the newly discovered biblical data, propose what modifications you are willing to make in order to reach a mutually agreed solution. (136)
6. If the problem cannot be resolved in the period of time agreed upon by both of you in advance, seek the assistance of a "true yokefellow." (136)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING CONFLICT WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS (134-136)

Have you ever wondered why the Bible says that wisdom should be sought after as silver rather than as gold? Even though gold is more valuable, it can be found without much digging. But silver must be mined – you have to dig deep for it. So it is with wisdom. To find it, you must sometimes dig deep into the Scriptures. It may take days or weeks. It may require the acquisition of certain tools (Bible concordances, dictionaries, and commentaries). It may take consultation with experts (church leaders) to determine exactly where to start excavating. Here are a few questions to help you as you begin digging.

Question #1. Have we identified the problem (and its components) in biblical terms? A problem cannot be solved biblically until it is first diagnosed in biblical terminology. The operative phrase is found in 1 Corinthians 2:13: "Not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit taught words" (NIV). Force yourself to think biblically. Don't settle for less than God's interpretation of the problem. If you want to find a lasting biblical solution, keep searching for the proper diagnosis.

Question #2. Are there any other directives in Scripture that we must obey in order to resolve this conflict (or solve this problem)? Sometimes the resolution to a specific kind of conflict can be found clearly delineated in the Bible. So in order for you to resolve the matter, at least in part, specific scriptural commands must be obeyed. Up to this point you may have identified some of them, but are there others you have missed?

Question #3. Are there any principles in Scripture from which a resolution to this conflict (or a solution to this problem) can be derived? Sometimes the solution to a particular problem is not clearly delineated in the Scriptures, and it must therefore be derived from appropriate biblical principles. For example, if a husband and wife are in disagreement over whether he should take a job that puts him on the road away from home for four days a week, they probably won't find much about "how many hours a man can be away from home" or "whether it is acceptable for a married man to travel for a living." But they can find principles on the importance of a husband caring for his family financially, on the importance of a husband caring for his wife's well-being, on the father's role in parenting, on how to make decisions, and on a wife's need to submit to her husband. These are sometimes referred to as biblically derived solutions. A biblically derived solution is one that a Christian derives in accordance with biblical principles in order to fulfill a goal to which no specific directives are given in Scripture. More often than not, "righteousness conflicts" are resolved by implementing biblical principles rather than by obeying biblical directives. Often, both biblically directed solutions and biblically derived solutions are necessary in order to solve problems effectively. But remember, a biblically derived solution must never be elevated to the place of a biblically directed solution. Not to distinguish between the two, and thereby raising a biblical principle to the level of a command, runs the risk of being legalistic. As I sometimes tell those whom I counsel, "You need to read your Bible more regularly than you have been doing. Unless you have a better idea, I suggest that you begin with the book of Proverbs" (or the part of the Bible most relevant to their situation).

Question #4. Has anyone in Scripture ever faced the same (or a similar) situation? The Bible not only contains commands and principles that are helpful for solving problems, it also contains a wealth of examples (both good and bad) that give insight into the right and wrong ways of solving problems. It was partly for our assistance in solving life's dilemmas that these examples have been included in Scripture. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).