

## I. GOD RULES OVER CHAOS – GEN. 1

- A. The God introduced to us in Gen. 1 is a God who rules over chaos. As the God who created the world, bringing order to chaos; God holds all authority in the earthly realm. By reason of this authority, he has a plan and purpose for all things under his authority – even conflict.
- B. By reason of God setting two trees in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve’s failure, we can see that God set conflict in the garden for a purpose.
- C. God begins to rule over chaos in creation.

***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Gen. 1: 1-2***

- D. In Psalm 24: 1-2, David began by declaring that the earth belongs to the Lord because He is its creator (24:1-2).

***<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. <sup>2</sup>For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Ps. 24:1-2)***

1. ***The earth is the Lord’s:*** The earthly sphere into which Jesus returns to live and reign in is already His by virtue of being its creator.
2. ***He founded it upon the seas:*** The Lord prevailed over the watery forces of chaos when He made the dry land emerge in the process of creating the earth (Gen. 1:9-10; 2 Pet. 3:5). He established the dry land on the “waters” which here is a synonym for “seas.” God caused the earth or dry land to emerge above or beside by pushing back the seas and waters, thus making it suitable for humans.

***<sup>9</sup>Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens **be gathered together** into one place, and let the dry land appear,” and it was so. <sup>10</sup>And God called the **dry land** Earth... (Gen. 1:9-10)***

- E. The creation is set forth in Ps. 24:1-2 as an example of God’s sovereign power to conquer chaos. The Lord who possessed the power to conquer chaos in creation has power to conquer conflict and enable resolution.

## II. THE NECESSITY AND PURPOSE OF CONFLICT

- A. God has a purpose for conflict and trouble. If it were not so he would not have created his world placing conflict at the center of that world.

***<sup>8</sup>The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. <sup>9</sup>And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Gen. 2: 8-17***

1. When God created man in the image and likeness of the Godhead, man was created with free will choice. This had to be so or man would not have been in God's likeness and image.
  2. This free will choice was for the primary purpose of choosing and learning to love.
  3. Adam and Eve were to be strengthened in their love for God and one another not just by what they agreed was good (right) but also by what was not good (not right). Strength comes to us from Holy Spirit to choose right from wrong, good from evil. This knowledge was to grow in relationship to God.
  4. It was necessary for God to give Adam and Eve free choice and to place an opposing choice in their lives thereby creating conflict.
- B. David's development as King of Israel was forged in conflict.
1. Rejection at home. Ps. 27:10; 69:8-12
  2. Mistreatment by King Saul, an older jealous man. 1 Sam. 17-30
  3. Attack from Absalom, a younger ambitious man. 2 Sam. 14-18
- C. Healthy conflict transforms us into the image of Christ. God uses other people and situations to bring us to the deepest level of wholehearted love without violating our free will.
- <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rom. 12:2***
- D. There are several lessons God intends for man to learn through conflict.
1. ***Security*** and ***safety*** are found in relationship with God, being with Him where He is, not at a great distance from ones' enemy.  
***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...Ps. 23:5a***
  2. God desires true ***peace*** with man/woman—agreement and union.  
***that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:21-23***
  3. When and how to ***yield*** (humility) confident in God's grace and love.
  4. When and how to ***stand our ground under attack*** confident in God's grace and love.
  5. Conflict is a tool for ***transformation*** into the image of Christ.

### III. DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

#### A. Definition:

1. “An active disagreement between people (or groups) with opposing opinions or principles.”<sup>1</sup>
2. “Conflict exists when one person has a need of another and that need is not being met.”<sup>2</sup>
3. “Conflict is where communication breaks down, and relationships suffer.”<sup>3</sup>

#### B. I want to help you develop an appreciation for “healthy conflict”, embrace it, and begin to cultivate strategies (tools) you can deploy as you face conflict situations.

1. Conflict is not always bad—life and ministry are not about avoiding conflict but how to deal with it.
  - a. 99.9% of all conflict failures begin with this truth – humans *fear* conflict.

#### C. Why is healthy conflict important?

1. Healthy conflict is a sign of trust and security.
2. Healthy conflict invites diverse points of view.
3. Healthy conflict surfaces potential issues.
4. Healthy conflict builds commitment.
5. Healthy conflict leads to better decisions.

### IV. NATURE OF CONFLICT

#### A. Conflict takes on various types

1. Main root(s) of conflict
  - a. Man vs. God
  - b. Man vs. Himself
2. Secondary manifestations of conflict
  - a. Man vs. Man; Man vs. Society

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Dictionary -- <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict>

<sup>2</sup> Breakthrough in Marketing series on Conflict Resolution - <http://www.resolutionofconflict.com.au/> and <https://youtu.be/KY5TWVz5ZDU>

<sup>3</sup> Irish Traveller Movement - <https://itmconflictmgmt.com/making-sense-of-conflict/what-are-we-actually-going-to-do-about-conflict/>

## V. FORENSICS OF CONFLICT

A. James is very clear that conflict first comes from internal desires that have yet to be sanctified.

***Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? <sup>6</sup> But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” James 4:1-6***

1. To be a Christian is to agree with the sanctification or transformational process. God working his love and righteousness deeper into our soul, since he has already sown it into our spirits by the Holy Spirit.
2. When we fight God and this transformation process, we walk in internal conflict which always manifests in our earthly behaviors.
3. Men and women who are at war with God will be at war with their world. Conversely, men and women who are at peace with God, will generally be at peace with their world.

B. Main Causes of conflict. For the most part, the “presenting problem” in a conflict is rarely the real motivating driver of a conflict. It is commonly accepted that most conflicts are motivated by any four primary areas.

1. Needs – Often whether physical or non-physical, human needs can trigger conflict. Whether those needs go unmet or whether there is a hoarding of resources to meet need, conflict can arise when needs are not met or access to resources is blocked, denied or difficult to obtain.
2. Values – Often conflict arises from competing values, beliefs, world-views,
3. Status – Often conflict arises from competing levels of human status – attainment, gifting, wealth, gender, ethnicity, etc.
4. Identity – Often conflict arises and is rooted in insecurity stemming from misplaced identity. God seeks to set our identity in him, on unshakable foundations. He sends us life situations to steer us to a correct path.

C. What are the main components or triggers of conflict? Using our definition and experience.

1. Injustices. Breach of moral, relational or civil law (boundaries) when someone believes they or another have been treated unfairly or with prejudice.
2. Competing narratives.

3. Unmet and unstated need.
  4. Desire to protect principles, values, norms or traditions.
  5. Competing points of view—“...battle of absolutes”, values, norms, beliefs, traditions, ways of doing something, leadership styles.
  6. Various personality types (same for corporate groups vs. other corporate groups)
  7. Communication – styles, meaning, understanding.
  8. Cultural Variations – growing up in differing values.
- D. In many cases, what appears superficially to be the conflict, has a deeper greater hidden flashpoint that must be uncovered.
1. John 3—Tale of Two Men
    - a. Nicodemus
    - b. John the Baptist
  2. Gen. 25: 29-34; Mal.1:2-4
    - a. Esau
    - b. Jacob
- E. Motivations to resolve conflict
1. Realization that unresolved conflict can be destructive.
  2. Ripeness for resolution
    - a. Breaking God’s law
    - b. Tiredness or exhaustion
    - c. Level of “bloodshed”
    - d. Financial, emotional, spiritual benefits.
- F. Negative methods of managing conflict.
1. In activity
  2. Avoidance
    - a. Pretending the conflict doesn’t exist

## b. Silence

- G. Assessing the consequences to inactivity with conflict provides one with a call to action or to seek resolution.

**VI. UNHEALTHY CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT—IDENTIFYING TOXIC ENVIRONMENTS**

- A. Unhealthy conflict can lead to toxic environments. Often the fruit of such unhealthy conflict can be:
1. Loss of camaraderie or trust;
  2. Lower productivity and a lack of motivation;
  3. Changes in behavior that signal a lack of interest or withdrawal;
  4. Expressions of stress or anxiety, which often start as jokes and then descend into dark humor
  5. Complaints that represent a change in how a person feels about their living or working environments
  6. Destructive gossip that becomes part of your personal, family or workplace culture
  7. Increased number of days given to managing stress and anxiety
  8. The formation of cliques – not the friendly kind but the kind that takes sides and sows division
  9. Hostile or troublesome body language, such as frowning, avoiding eye contact or keeping a deliberate distance
  10. Toxic environments create disconnected, closed relationships and foster transient responses.

**VII. BIBLICAL METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

- A. Paul's command to live at peace with all men gives us a goal for our lives. Peace as stated by Paul means *union* or *agreement*. The peace we are looking for in our relationships is not just a cessation of conflict (cease fire) but union or agreement. This does not mean we all have to think the same, it means that we are “for” one another within the bonds of Jesus' love.

*As much as it depends on you live at peace with all men. (Rom. 12:18)*

- B. Matt. 18: 15-17—conflict resolution process – *peer to peer*.

1. **Private meeting.** This meeting is between you and your opponent. It is private. Clear statements of the issues must be discussed. Both sides must take the posture of being quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1: 19-21). Ask yourself the question, “Why is my brother/sister here to talk to me about this? They have a need. What is that need?”
  - a. Immediate defensiveness tells the other side you are not listening.
  - b. The goal is to win the relationship back to open heartedness not primarily “win” an argument.
2. **Two or three to go with you.** This is the first level of escalation. You are bringing in other witnesses to a commonly observed behavior. I personally believe you bring people who are friends of the other.
  - a. It is important to tell the other side you are now bringing others with you as witnesses to your conversation. Those who go with you are to be a witness to your discussion and share any common experiences they have had.
3. **Tell it to the church.** This is the next level of escalation and very serious. Now that it has been brought before the church, the church is being alerted to a behavior that all may not know exists because they have not experienced it. By taking the issue to the church you are warning the church of behavior that is seen as sinful and which they are to be aware of.
  - a. This is to be a careful step. Church congregations need to be warned of toxic behavior, but at the same time such disclosures can create division and factions. Ask the question: How much of the church needs to know? How do we cover over in love and not cover up?
4. **Separate ways.** This is the final level of escalation and most severe. The church has been warned of negative, toxic behavior and still the offender goes unchecked. Therefore, for the sake of the health of the greater congregation, the offender is asked to leave. They are pruned from the congregation.

C. 1Tim. 5:19-22—conflict resolution process – *dealing with leaders, elders.*

***<sup>19</sup> Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. <sup>21</sup> I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. <sup>22</sup> Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure. 1Tim. 5:19-22***

1. **Accusation from two or three witnesses.** Witnesses in this case are those who have directly experienced the offensive behavior.
  - a. I personally believe the best case for identifying offensive behavior is through witnesses who do not know one another’s experiences.

- b. I also do not hold to the view that victims need to have a private meeting. They can be represented or joined by advocates.
- 2. ***Rebuke in presence of all.*** I believe that we are to cover offensive non-criminal behavior and deal with offenses at the level in which they exist. However, there are times where the behavior of a leader or elder is consistently manifesting and the community must be warned not to participate in the sinful behavior.
- 3. ***Observe without prejudice or partiality.*** One of the hardest things to do is publically rebuke a leader of the faith who has sinned in a way that the community must be warned, especially when they are well known and have an extensive ministry.
  - a. This is the most difficult charge by Paul to Timothy, that when it comes time to deal with sinful behavior, and after all means of appeal have been exhausted and rejected by the offender, that they not be given special treatment because they are “well-known, high-ranking, wealthy, been in the church a long time, etc”
  - b. Safety and security is released to the community when its leaders are sanctioned and disciplined.
- D. Allowing the conflict resolution process time to “breathe” without ignoring the impact of open conflict.
- E. Setting boundaries.
- F. Dealing with toxic conflict—
- G. Spiritual nature of conflict – Eph. 6—we fight not against flesh and blood

## VIII. STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

- A. Basic Conflicts – If it is true that conflict is the result of unmet needs that have not be expressed then it stands to reason that:
  - 1. Step #1 – Express the need!
  - 2. Step #2 – Can the need be met – yes or no?
    - a. If yes, you ***resolve*** the conflict.
    - b. If no, you must ***manage*** the conflict.
- B. Two common ways conflicts are dealt with...
  - 1. ***Resolution*** – settling of the conflict where the competing sides are unified and at peace. Paul talked about the message and ministry of reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5. Resolution and reconciliation may have several steps or phases. Take each step as God gives grace.



- a. **Embrace conflict.** When **conflict** arises, don't avoid it or pretend nothing has happened.
  - b. **Talk together.** Set up a time and place so you can talk for an extended span without outside interruptions.
  - c. **Listen carefully.** As you listen, watch for statements of impact. You are listening for how your behavior has impacted another. Even if what you hear seems exaggerated, listen for even the 2% that is correct.
    - (1) Take responsibility when necessary. Apologize. Remove any sense of personal attack.
  - d. **Find agreement.** Listen for areas of agreement and affirm them.
  - e. **Provide guidance.** If a situation appears stuck, suggest a way forward that shares the responsibility and power between the two opposing sides.
  - f. **Be quick to apologize and/or forgive.** Do not carry grudges or seek vengeance. Release the battle through your forgiveness or apology.
2. **Management** – maintaining balance seeking to minimize new escalations of the same original conflict. “Agree to disagree...” or also known as a “cease fire.”
    - a. Setting boundaries helps manage the outbreak of ‘war’ enabling those in conflict to recover emotionally and spiritually.
    - b. Isaiah talks about waiting upon the Lord in order to renew strength. Isa. 40: 30-31
- C. The Thomas-Kilmann Model<sup>4</sup> of conflict resolution identifies five different approaches to resolving conflict. These approaches include:
1. Avoiding – Someone who uses a strategy of "avoiding" mostly tries to ignore or sidestep the conflict, hoping it will resolve itself or dissipate.
  2. Accommodating – Using the strategy of "accommodating" to resolve conflict essentially involves taking steps to satisfy the other party's concerns or demands at the expense of your own needs or desires.
  3. Compromising – The strategy of "compromising" involves finding an acceptable resolution that will partly, but not entirely, satisfy the concerns of all parties involved.
  4. Competing – Someone who uses the conflict resolution strategy of "competing" tries to satisfy their own desires at the expense of the other parties involved....

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<sup>4</sup> Portland Community College - <https://climb.pcc.edu/blog/what-are-the-five-conflict-resolution-strategies>

5. Collaborating – Using "collaborating" involves finding a solution that entirely satisfies the concerns of all involved parties.
- D. Simon Sinek, a well-known, well-respected author and motivational speaker with management relations developed a method for healthy confrontation. Using the acronym FBI,<sup>5</sup> Simon suggests the following.
1. F – Feelings - State how you *felt*. When...
  2. B – Behavior – When the other person did a specific thing (behavior, or said...)
  3. I – Impact – State specifically the potential impact further similar behavior will have on the relationship.

## IX. BALANCING THE TENSION – CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- A. Unfortunately not all conflicts are resolvable this side of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus! Why?
- B. Dealing with “intractable (unresolvable) conflict”
1. What does scripture say? Boundaries set by God.
  2. Boundaries set by governments? Criminal/civil laws should be obeyed.
  3. What is permitted for the sake of safety and security?

## X. MEDIATING AND MANAGING CONFLICT BETWEEN OTHERS.

- A. When is a mediator necessary? Formal or informal mediators are a blessing in conflict, and become necessary when common relational principles (“Matthew 18 Process”) have failed.
- B. Role of the mediator.
1. Establish neutral ground.
  2. Help isolate the root cause of the conflict. The root cause is often obscured and hidden by the events of the conflict.
  3. Help forge a pathway for the competing sides to build relationship.
  4. Help call the combatants to a higher truth according to Biblical standards.
  5. Help set boundaries if necessary.

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<sup>5</sup> Simon Sinek – Healthy Confrontation - [https://youtu.be/2M\\_kCCcNDts](https://youtu.be/2M_kCCcNDts)

## XI. IDENTIFYING COMMON CONFLICTS

### A. Various conflict examples

1. People's differing preference regarding music.
2. People's differing preferences regarding leadership and government styles.
3. Business partnerships or agreements that have failed.
4. Varying views and preferences regarding "personal and corporate holiness"
5. Personality and character clashes.
6. Personal differing financial views.
7. Conflicts rising from poor communication and role (job) responsibilities.

### B. Working through conflict samples. Case Studies and simulations provide help in reviewing how best to manage conflict. Looking back of closed cases of previous conflict help in gain valuable insight for the future. Simulations help us practice various scenarios and tools used in those conflicts.

#### 1. Local Church Scenarios

- a. The worship leader is under attack from congregants regarding the style, volume and type of worship music played during Sunday services. The worship leader is discouraged by the number and frequency of attacks.
- b. There is growing disunity with the leaders of your congregation not only in what decisions need to be made to move the church forward in its vision but how those decisions are made. You have one leader who is very traditional in their world-view, very black and white, who is adamant that all decisions be done the "right way, decently and in order" which is code for his/her way is the right way.
- c. A husband and wife come to you with their marriage under pressure. The husband throughout their marriage has struggled with a pornography addiction (or any addiction). The wife has been faithful to forgive but is now exhausted and no longer has strength to move forward in the relationship as it is.
- d. A married couple come to you for help. The wife is frustrated and what she considers to be her husband's lack of help in the home. The husband is frustrated that when he does help he is often told by his wife that he is not "doing the work right" and so decides not to help.

2. City/Regional/National
  - a. During a time of heightened crisis (financial, medical, political) there are several well-known authorities (spiritual, national, civil, etc.) who give their analysis of the reasons for the crisis and how to resolve it. You have several people in your congregation on various sides of the crisis, and the potential for division is growing.

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