

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Interpersonal conflict: Be reconciled to one another

Interpersonal conflict is part of life because we are all weak sinful people living amongst weak sinful people. None of us have yet reached perfection. Our character flaws may be minor, but they are still enough to cause conflict within a relationship. Sometimes the cause of the conflict is completely unintentional, but it happened nevertheless. Having conflicts in a relationship doesn't mean that your relationship is falling apart. However, your attitude towards each other in how you move forward in and after the conflict can make or break the relationship. What did Jesus think about how to move forward?

Matthew 5:23-24

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

1) Interpersonal conflict is as old as Adam and Eve

- The first interpersonal conflict mentioned in the Bible, and therefore in history, is between Adam and Eve where Adam blamed Eve for their sin.
 - Their sons, Cain and Abel, had an interpersonal conflict due to jealousy
 - Sarai and Hagar had a conflict as Sarai despised Hagar for having a son with Abraham
 - Jacob and Esau as Jacob stole Esau's birthright
 - Laban and Jacob were at loggerheads with each other as they were each as deceitful as the other
 - David committed adultery with Bathsheba and so also wronged her husband, Uriah
 - Jesus' disciples had conflicts over who was the greatest amongst them
- In our personal lives we might all have conflicts at home within our families, with friends, colleagues, community members, etc. over various issues
- In order to deal effectively with the conflict we need to understand the cause of it and be willing to deal with it in an appropriate manner.
 - James 4:1-3 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
 - Proverbs 13:10 Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.
 - In essence the root cause of conflict is sin and self-centredness, and self-centredness is rooted in pride.
- Sin and pride:
 - Blames others for their own wrong actions, as Adam did to Eve
 - Is jealous of the others as Cain was of Abel
 - Despises the success of others over your own inability, as Sarai did to Hagar
 - Steps on others to become first, as Jacob did to Esau
 - Is not honest and deceives others to get what you want, as Laban and Jacob were to each other
 - Follows carnal desires for self-pleasure and then tries to cover it up, as David did with Bathsheba and Uriah
 - Thinks of yourself more highly than you should, as the disciples did.
- Not all conflict is rooted in the primary action but can also be due to misunderstanding and wrong responses to that action

2) Outcomes of resolving and not resolving conflict

- It is imperative that conflict be resolved, and the sooner the better.
- Many broken relationships were good relationships that could have been saved if care was taken to resolve the conflicts that ended up breaking them.
- A bigger problem when relationships are broken is that it doesn't normally only affect the two people concerned. It has a wider ripple effect on the lives of others as well
 - Let's take divorce as an example. If they have kids then the kids are torn between them. The parents and siblings of the couple then have a strained relationship with each other as they're still the grandparents, uncles and aunts of the kids.
 - The same principle can apply with any two people in a church, organisation, or company.
- Cain and David's unresolved sin led them to commit murder
 - These are extreme outcomes of unresolved conflict.
- Most negative outcomes of unresolved conflicts are far less extreme, but nevertheless distressing
 - I've already mentioned the negative ripple effect on others
 - Anger, bitterness, and resentment can consume you and this alone can affect your relationships with other people as you carry that into all your relationships
 - If it's unresolved conflict at work it can adversely affect the quality of your work putting your job at jeopardy.
- The biggest negative effect that unresolved conflicts have is that they dishonour God
 - Jesus died on a cross to reconcile us to God and to break down the dividing walls of hostility between us
 - If He went to those lengths for our reconciliation then isn't it dishonouring Him and the sacrifice that He made for us when we don't resolve our conflicts?
- Resolving our conflicts has many positive outcomes
 - Joy and peace within ourselves as well as between us and others
 - We don't have to hide from those who we had a conflict with

3) Be reconciled to one another

- Jesus commanded us to be reconciled to one another
 - Matthew 5:23-24 If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
- He didn't make it an optional extra in the Christian life
 - Not making an effort to be reconciled to someone is an act of disobedience to God
- Obviously reconciliation only happens when both parties are willing to reconcile.
- But you need to make every effort from your side to resolve conflicts between you and anyone you have a conflict for reconciliation to take place
 - Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
 - If the other person refuses to deal with the issue to resolve the conflict then be at peace that you have made every effort for reconciliation to take place.
 - You can't control the action of others, but you can control what you do.