

Christ-Honoring Communication & Conflict Resolution

What precedes Ephesians 4:25-32?

A. The Definition of Communication:

1. A process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the sender's message is understood in the way he intended it to be understood...the people involved are mutually strengthened, enriched, and encouraged, and thus experience harmony, unity, and emotional closeness. Wayne Mack
2. Good communication from God's perspective is sending a message that is true, holy, purposeful, clear, and timely. The recipient in love, humility and with care should listen to what is being said, trying to understand where the communicator is coming from without reacting – clarifying with questions if needed. Upon receiving the message, the recipient should then ponder before answering and continue using these biblical principles.

B. Four helpful principles of communication: (Eph. 4:25-32, remember this is in light of our Union with Christ and the fact that we are new creatures in Christ living for the glory of God, 1 Cor 10:31)

1. PRINCIPLE 1 – Be _____ in the Family of God (Eph. 4:25)
 - a) Speak
 - b) Speak truth.
 - c) Speak truth lovingly (Eph. 4:15; Ps 141:3; Prv 13:3; 21:23)
 - (1) Be concerned with what you say.
 - (2) Be concerned with how you say it.
 - (3) Be concerned with how much you say.
 - (4) Be concerned with when you say it.
 - (5) Be concerned with why you say it
 - d) Become a skilled listener (takes practice).
2. PRINCIPLE 2 – Be _____, don't sin & if you do, _____
_____ (vv. 26, 27).
 - a) Righteous anger will be concerned about God, His glory and the good of other people (Matt 22:36-40)
 - b) Righteous anger will also seek to resolve the problem in a righteous way (Nehemiah 5; James 1:19-20).

c) Failure in attempting to solve each day's problems quickly is sin.
Don't carry them over into tomorrow. (See Matt. 6:34)

d) Failure to solve problems quickly (4:31):

- (1) Opens way to resentment, hatred, and bitterness
- (2) Distorts subsequent problems
- (3) Endangers the sexual relationship (in marriage)
- (4) Sets the stage for spiritual discouragement

e) Questions to ask before bringing up an issue:

3. PRINCIPLE 3 – Don't tear down but build up (vv. 29,30).

a) "Unwholesome words"

- (1) Words that tear down
- (2) Words that bypass the conflict
- (3) Words that grieve the Holy Spirit

b) Edifying words

- (1) Words that encourage or build up
- (2) Words that deal with what the person says or does
- (3) Words that help reach a solution

4. PRINCIPLE 4 – Respond like _____, not in the Flesh (vv. 31,32).

a) Typical Reactions (v. 31)

(1) Attitudes and actions that must be put off:

- (a) Bitterness
- (b) Wrath
- (c) Anger
- (d) Clamor
- (e) Slander
- (f) Malice

(2) The natural tendency of our sinful flesh is to be defensive about dealing with our own sins (shift blame, run, react, etc.).

b) Godly Actions (v. 32)

(1) Attitudes and actions that must be put on (v.32):

- (a) Kindness
- (b) Tender-heartedness
- (c) Forgiveness

(2) It is only through God's Spirit that we can learn to be this way (cf. Rom 8).

- c) Conflicts are resolved when we humbly and prayerfully act and don't selfishly react.

CONCLUSION

1. Changing our hearts and lives (habits) is impossible on our own and is difficult even with God's help. But by God's Spirit and His strengthening grace, it can and must be done. 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 2:12-13; Col 1:28-29; 1 Timothy 4:7-9; Romans 8:13
2. What principle(s) do you need to work on the most?
3. When will you plan on working on this?
4. Who will you ask to help you (or assist you with accountability)?

A Suggested Homework Assignment for Communication – **The Conference Table**¹

1. What It Is
 - a) A homework assignment designed to help people develop effective, biblical communication patterns
 - b) A strategy for helping people put off the old sinful ways of communicating and putting on the new, biblical way of communicating
 - c) A forum for discussing and resolving conflicts and problems in a constructive way
2. Rationale
 - a) We have an inborn capacity for developing habits.
 - b) Because we are born sinners, many of the habit patterns we developed were unbiblical.
 - c) These sinful patterns need to be changed because they are:
 - (1) Displeasing to God
 - (2) Harmful to the person
 - (3) Hurtful to that person's relationships with other people
 - d) To change these unbiblical habit patterns requires:
 - (1) The new birth and all its results and benefits
 - (2) An awareness and acknowledgment of wrong habit patterns
 - (3) An understanding of and desire for the development of biblical habit patterns

¹ Adapted from Jay Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*

- (4) Practice the new behavior pattern until it becomes a habit – Hebrews 5:13-14, Ephesians 4:22-24, and 2 Timothy 3:16 delineate the biblical process by which change occurs.
 - e) The conference table is one way to facilitate the practice of proper communication patterns.
3. Arrangements
 - a) Time – agreeable to everyone; when least likelihood of interruption; not at worst physically
 - b) Place – preferably not some place with bad associations
 4. Rules
 - a) Participants – everyone involved
 - b) Leadership
 - c) Secretary – writes down day and time, topics, solutions, steps to be taken, topics not solved (possibly 'he said, she said' journal)
 - d) Communication principles of Ephesians 4:25-32
 5. Procedure
 - a) Ephesians 1 (God's glory first and foremost) then remind each other of the context of the Gospel, then into 4:25-32
 - b) Prayer
 - c) Initially deal with day's concerns
 - d) If none, with most recent issue
 - e) Everyone takes turn talking and the others listen
 - f) Problems only at conference table
 - g) Problems discussed with view to solution
 6. Length
 - a) Each session - at least 15-20 minutes, no more than 30
 - b) If no solution, put off until next time.
 - c) If still no solution after several tries, seek godly counsel

Resources

- Mack, Wayne. *Relationships God's Way* (Wayne covers about 6-8 chapters on communication)
- Scott, Stuart. *Communication and Conflict Resolution* (Focus Publishers)
- Tripp, Paul. *War of Words*.

Conflict Resolution

Understanding and Seeking to Resolve Issues by the Spirit's Help

A. Exactly What Is a Conflict?

1. Literally = Strike, fight against
2. A General Definition:

*...not all conflict is bad; instead, it teaches that some differences are natural and beneficial...not all conflict is neutral or beneficial, however. The Bible teaches that many disagreements are the direct result of sinful motives and behavior...the Bible teaches that we should see conflict neither as an inconvenience nor as an occasion for selfish gain, but rather as an opportunity to glorify God, to serve others, and to grow to be like Christ. (K.Sande, *The Peacemakers*, 19,20)*

Conflict is when both parties (usually) sin against one another (in their communication and/or their actions) and are then in opposition to one another. (S.Scott, 'usually' added)²

B. What does God think of conflict?

1. It is grievous (Matt. 5:21-22).
2. He wants His children to have no part in it (unless it's over Guarding the Truth, 1 Cor 11:18-10 or standing up for the Gospel – Mat 10:34-38).
3. He wants His children to pursue peace (Rom. 12:18, 14:19; Eph. 4:1,3).
4. He wants His children to avoid needlessly or sinfully offending someone (1 Cor. 10:31-32).
5. He wants His children to love, pray for, and do good to those who sin against them (Mt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:21).

C. Where do conflicts come from and possible solutions?

1. Doctrinal: Gospel doctrines (saved or unsaved), Major and Minor doctrines (saved but in different churches or in same church), e.g., Dr. Mohler, *Theological Triage Chart & other chart*
 - 1 Cor 15:1-11 (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:1-4)
 - 1 Cor 11:19

² *Communication and Conflict Resolution*, Scott (Focus Publishers). I discuss within the booklet the various types of conflict, what to do before a conflict, during one and after one.

2. Differences (nationality, cultural, upbringing, education, etc.)
 - Acts 15:19-21 (Gentiles and Jews together)
 - Phil 4:1-2(?)
 - Col 3:13
3. Desires³ (Jas 4:1-3)⁴
 - Adam and Eve (Gen 3)
 - Rachel (Gen 30:1)
 - Gehazi (2 Ki 5:15-27)
 - Etc.
4. Offenses (sin)
 - Nathan to David (2 Sam 11-12)
 - Paul to Peter (Gal 2:11-14)
 - Jealousy/Envy (Mark 15:10)
 - 1 John 1:9; Matt 18:15ff; Luke 17:3
 - Etc.
5. Conscience
 - Rom 14 (Weaker and Stronger brother)
 - Phil 4:1-2?
 - Etc.
6. Preferences
 - Abraham and Lot (Gen 13:8-12)
 - Phil 2:1-4
 - Phil 4:1-2?
 - Etc.
7. Wisdom
 - David to Solomon and Solomon to his son (Ps 141:3; Prov 21:23)
 - Proverbs
 - Ezra 10 (choosing the best of the two not so good options)

³ “...is the outlook oriented towards the self, that which pursues its own ends in self-sufficient independence of God.” NIDNTT, 17-35

⁴ Paul Tripp writes about the progression of a desire at times: I desire, I need, I expect, I'm disappointed, So I judge & punish. (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 86-88).

- Acts 15:36-41 (:39, Paul and Barnabas separate)
 - Phil 4:1-2?
 - Etc.
8. Communication Challenges (could involve physiological complications)
- Phineas (Jos 22:10-34)
 - Phil 4:1-2(?)
 - Proverbs
 - Jas 1:19
 - Etc.
9. Physical factors (proven organic issues)
- 1 Kings 18-19 (Elijah)
 - 2 Cor 4:16 (outer man and inner man)
10. Standards (could be a combination of God's and man's for home, work, church, etc.)
- Titus 2:12 (standards of training)
 - 1 Pt 2:11-12 (standards of conduct)
 - For wherever you live, work, attend, etc.
11. Etc.

D. Benefits of differences and disagreements

1. They can encourage us to search the Scriptures (Ps. 119:71-72).
2. They can help us think carefully about how and what we think or what we believe (Prov. 15:28).
3. They can help us work harder at communicating effectively (Eph. 4:25).
4. They can produce maturity and endurance (Jas. 1:2-5).
5. They can help us sharpen one another (Prov. 27:17).
6. They can strengthen our faith in the truth that God is working all things together for good (Rom. 8:28-29).
7. They give us opportunity to practice servanthood and preferring one another (Phil. 2:2-3).
8. They give us opportunity to love and glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31-32)

E. How Do We Avoid Conflicts?

1. Some Sinful Ways to Avoid Conflict
 - a. Just keep quiet (cf. Eccl. 3:7b; Eph. 4:29-31; Col. 3:19).
 - b. Stay away from one another (cf. John 15:12; 1 Pet. 4:8)
 - c. Change the subject (cf. Prov. 12:22; Prov. 24:28)
 - d. Hide information, sins, or bitterness (cf. Prov. 24:8).
2. Some God-honoring Ways to Avoid Conflict
 - a. Seek to know the other person well, appreciate him/her and understand his/her perspective (1 Peter 3:7). This helps with matters of differences, communication challenges and with physiological complications)
 - b. Gather plenty of data before speaking (Proverbs 18:13, 17).
 - c. Pray, study and think about the issue before speaking, if possible (Proverbs 15:28).
 - d. Demonstrate and/or communicate your love and care at the time of disagreement (Romans 12:9-10).
 - e. Listen more than you speak but do speak.
 - f. In matters of sin, approach the other person in love (Ephesians 4:15).
 - g. In matters of preference, prefer the other (Romans 12:10).
 - h. In matters of wisdom and conscience, suggest searching the Scriptures and getting godly counsel (Proverbs 11:14; 2 Timothy 2:15).
 - i. Refuse to sin in your communication (Proverbs 8:6-8).
 - j. Be more interested in God's glory and the other's good, rather than having your own way, or being right (Joshua 22:5; Romans 15:2). This is reflecting Christlike humility rather than self-centered Pride.
 - k. Give a gentle and caring answer to their angry words (Proverbs 15:1).

F. Resolving Conflicts

1. Some Sinful Ways to Resolve Conflicts
 - a. Let time heal it (cf. Mt. 5:23-24; Eph. 4:26).
 - b. Try to bury it.
 - c. Pretend it never happened (cf. Phil. 4:8a).
 - d. Wait for the other person to initiate the resolution process (cf. Matt. 5:23-24).

- e. Punish the other person until they change and take all the blame (cf. Gal. 6:1; Rom. 12:9-20).

2. A Biblical Way to Resolve Conflict

- a. Confess any sin that you are aware of to God (Ps. 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9-10).
- b. Go to the other person, ask for forgiveness for each thing you did specifically and discuss your plan not to do those things again (Eph. 4:32; James 5:16).
- c. Express a desire to resolve the conflict fully and decide together when the best time to do that would be (Prov. 15:28).
- d. Come together at the appointed time.
- e. Pray together for God's wisdom, self-control, and speech (Prov. 16:32; Jas. 1:5).
- f. Review God's rules of communication (Eph. 4:15, 26-32).
- g. Each one should take a turn to confess any sin that has not been confessed (to God and the other) and ask for forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Jas. 5:16; 1 Jn. 1:9).
- h. Begin discussing the issues that precipitated the conflict.
- i. Decide what you can agree upon (each takes a turn).
- j. Decide what you do not agree upon (each takes a turn).
- k. Decide what kind of issue(s) you are dealing with (each offers input – use chart).
- l. Decide on specific steps to resolve the issue (each offers input).
- m. Together, begin carrying out the appropriate steps to resolve the issue.
- n. Decide if and when you need to discuss the issue again.
- o. End your time together with prayer and words of affirmation.

Ken Sande suggests using the **P.A.U.S.E.** principle

P – Prepare

A – Affirm relationships

U – Understand interests

S – Search for creative solutions

E – Evaluate options objectively and reasonably

NAME(S): _____

RESOLVING CONFLICT CHART

TYPE OF ISSUE:		DESCRIPTION:			REMEDY:	
DEFINED	PARTICIPANTS	BIBLICAL REFERENCE	YOUR PART TO REMEDY	1st STEP FOR YOU TO TAKE	OUTCOME	
DOCTRINE		- NO GOSPEL? - SEPARATE CHURCHES? - STAY IN SAME CHURCH?				
DIFFERENCE		- COL 3:13				
DESIRES		- JAS 4:1-3				
CLEAR SIN		- MT 5:23; LK 17:3; MT 18:15-35				
CONSCIENCE		- ROM 14				
PREFERENCE		- PHIL 2:1-5				
WISDOM		- PROVERBS				
COMMUNICATION		- JAS 3; EPH 4:25-32				
PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS		- 1 KI 18-19; 2 COR 4:16				
STANDARDS (disciplined training)		- TITUS 2:12; 1 PT 2:11-12				
ETC.						