

Dealing with Conflict

Lesson Eleven

Focal Text: 2 Corinthians 10

Background: 2 Corinthians 10

Teaching Aim: To lead members to identify four principles for resolving personal conflicts and apply these to past, current, or future conflicts in their lives.

Connect with Life: In the book “The Peacemaker” by Ken Sande, the author suggests the following definition of conflict: “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.” Ask members to evaluate this definition and offer suggestions to better help them define the concept of conflict within in the church. Allow time for members to recall times of personal conflict they have had or may be having with another person (in or out of the church).

In this same book, Ken Sande shares the following experience with one of his clients: “Deficiencies in the construction of Steve’s new home had resulted in a lawsuit, a countersuit, months of legal discovery, and thousands of dollars in attorney’s fees. During a deposition, one of the attorneys finally realized what a contradiction he was watching: two prominent businessmen, both Christians, were growing increasingly bitter and hostile as each continued to justify his own actions and focus on the other’s faults. The attorney’s concern led him to suggest that the men submit their dispute to Christian conciliation.” The author continues to share what happened when these men, even though reluctantly at first, began to apply Christian principles of reconciliation to their apparently hopeless situation. “By showing a concern for God’s commands and reputation, Bill and Steve had resolved their dispute and restored important relationships. Better yet, they had brought praise and honor to God and shown at least one other person how good and powerful he is.”

We will discover some of the principles they used in reconciling their differences in our study for today. Hopefully, each of us will be able to apply these principles to our own dealings with conflict or minister more effectively to those we know that are experiencing a time of conflict with a Christian brother. Author Ken Sande says, “Contrary to what you may have heard, God’s highest purpose for you is not to make you comfortable, wealthy, and happy. If you have put your faith in him, he has something far more wonderful in mind for you—he plans to conform you to the likeness of his Son! He began to change you the day you yielded yourself to him, and he will continue this process throughout your life. Conflict is one of the many tools that God can use to help you develop a more Christlike character.”

Guide Bible Study: To begin with, lead members to identify the problem or conflict being addressed by Paul in this “letter fragment” (share background information about the probable sequence of chapters 10-13). This will give you an opportunity to review some of the previous lessons which also relate to this same problem. Basically, members

will remember that some “super-apostles” in the church were questioning the authority, ability, and integrity of Paul by insisting on his inferiority to them.

Then lead members to identify the principles followed by Paul in seeking to resolve this conflict situation. Let this be a practical application approach as you allow members to apply these principles to this problem and to a specific example of conflict from their own lives (either inside or outside the church). Suggested principles and applications include the following:

1. **PRINCIPLE: (2 Corinthians 10:1-2) We are challenged by Paul to maintain a Christlike attitude during our experiences with conflict.** Specifically Paul challenges us to demonstrate the meekness and gentleness of Christ. “The meekness and gentleness of Christ, when activated in the character of the church leader, makes the authority of the leader appealing.” “Meekness means strength under control; here it is a relational term used to offer leniency to those deserving of greater punishment. Gentleness typically means to be reasonable or fair; when coupled with meekness, the word means to be gentle or especially kind.” The opponents of Paul had mistaken his meekness as timidity. Paul reminded them that his boldness (a worldly standard for leadership) had come under the control of Christ. So must ours if we are to be effective in conflict resolution.

Points of application: Paul remained strong in his convictions while expressing meekness in his dealings with the people. We do not have to sacrifice integrity or convictions for the sake of meekness. While remaining firm in our position we can discover openness to others when we focus on a Christlike attitude.

2. **PRINCIPLE: (2 Corinthians 10:3-6) When dealing with conflict we should use the right weapons; God’s truth, not the world’s humanistic methods.** Ask members to discover several examples given by Paul related to the power of the truth. These include:
 - a. It can demolish strongholds (crystallized opinions).
 - b. It can demolish arguments and pretensions (discerns between man’s ideas, opinions and the truth of God).
 - c. It can captivate our thought processes (turn them away from ourselves to God).
 - d. It can deal effectively with disobedience (reveals our sin and brings repentance).

Points of application: Throughout this letter Paul is trying to set the record straight regarding the accusations of his critics. He presents the truth regarding his position as an apostle of Christ and regarding his actions. He is so non-defensive about this that we have a difficult time determining for certain what his critics were saying about him. It remains obvious that his primary concern is for the welfare of the Gospel and the church, not himself. It is important for us to define our position or opinion clearly and then examine this carefully in light of God’s truth that can be discovered through prayer and Bible study.

3. **PRINCIPLE (2 Corinthians 10:7-11)** When dealing with conflict we should consider the welfare of all parties involved. Ask members to identify four guidelines given by Paul in these verses to help us with this principle. These include:
- a. Look below the surface (try to understand where they are coming from).
 - b. Remember that all parties belong to Christ (which means they may be right or at least have pure motives).
 - c. Try to improve each person's situation in the church (build up rather than pull down).
 - d. Remain consistent in your actions (practice what you preach).

Points of application: Paul was willing to grant them their boasting but asked that he be given his due. He did not deny their status with Christ but simply asked that they return the favor. Paul assured them that he would be consistent in their presence with what he said in his letters. It is important for us to remain focused on each person involved as a child of God who can make a contribution to the work of this church. There is no better opportunity to demonstrate our faith than when dealing with persons in times of conflict. (Share the illustrations related to Will Rogers, D.L. Moody, and the missionary from page 4 of the online commentary.)

4. **PRINCIPLE (2 Corinthians 10:12-18)** When dealing with conflict we should remain focused on God's purpose and glory, not our purpose and glory. In all of this it was obvious that Paul was only concerned with God's glory, not his own. Ask members to discover four guidelines related to this principle as shared by Paul in these verses. These are as follows:
- a. Keep a proper self perspective (humility) by comparing yourself to Christ or others that are more mature than you.
 - b. Remember your gifts and God's call to ministry (you aren't called or gifted to do everything needed in your church).
 - c. Find a way to work together to further the Gospel.
 - d. Seek a resolution that glorifies God and his purpose for you and your church.

Points of application: Paul knew how to stay within God's boundaries for himself and his ministry. His boasting was never for himself or for the work of others but for God. His genuine humility was made possible by recognizing his limitations and his need for the ministry of others. We can become so self-focused that we can become prideful and narrow focused. We must remember to keep the big picture of God's work in mind and discover ways to maximize the small part played by every member.

Encourage Application: Repeat the definition of conflict from Ken Sande's book: "a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires". Lead members to focus on their personal example of conflict. Ask them to identify the

difference(s) in opinion or purpose(s) that is at the core of this conflict. Encourage them to relate the following questions to their experience with conflict:

1. Have you maintained a Christlike attitude of meekness and gentleness toward those with whom you have the conflict?
2. Have you been able to state your opinion or purpose clearly and do you feel strongly about your desired goals?
3. Have you prayed this through thoroughly (personally and corporately) in order to discover the will of God related to this issue?
4. Have you discovered potential areas of selfish determination to have your way even though it now appears that you could be in opposition to the will of God in this matter?
5. Have you discovered possible areas of disobedience in your life that may be contributing to the problem?
6. Have you asked God to help you see the other person(s) as a Christian who is trying to accomplish God's will in this situation?
7. Have you genuinely tried to consider the possibility that the other person(s) may be right or at least consider the purity of their motives?
8. Have you carefully considered the negative or positive consequences to all parties involved when the conflict has been resolved?
9. Have you considered the impact this situation is having on others who may be observing your actions during this process of conflict resolution?
10. Have you demonstrated genuine and continued humility in your dealings with others by gaining a genuine appreciation for what they mean to the life of this church?
11. Have you discovered a way for God to be glorified in the final resolution of this conflict or is someone involved in the conflict receiving the glory?

Share the following: "Believers are never less attractive to the world than when we're fighting each other. Divisions and infighting have scarred the public reputation of entire denominations. Interpersonal conflicts have split more churches than any other single factor. Satan is a great economist- he loves to throw one rock into the lake and watch as the ripples touch every shore. And he knows that when we are divided against one another, we cannot be unified against him."

Challenge members to apply the following to their personal experience with conflict: On a scale of 0 to 100 (with 100 being maximum possible effort), how would you rate the effort you have made thus far to restore peace and resolve this dispute? What kind of effort would please and honor God? What will you do this week?