

Dealing With Conflict

The road to conflict and human attempts to resolve it and the true God-given road to reconciliation.

Conflict is an emotive subject.

When our passions are aroused, the anger and fear involved cloud our thinking.

The result is ill-considered words and actions that bring with them regret, remorse and guilt trapping us into a state of helpless introspection.

Although conflict is an experience that is common to us all, and some people even enjoy it, few of us clearly understand its origin, nature and how to decrease it in our lives.

Not all methods used in society to bring about peace in a conflict are good or profitable, because reconciliation has not been reached.

Peace falls on a battlefield after the last pocket of resistance has been overcome but is that reconciliation between the warring parties?

Peace rests on the empty factory after the confrontation of management and union has bankrupted the business. Is such a result profitable?

True peace can only come as an end result of reconciliation and reconciliation only comes if we approach conflict in a certain way.

Reconciliation has to do with restoration of unity and harmony, **not** simply the cessation of conflict.

There are available age-old principles and practices, too often neglected, that are guidelines to reconciliation.

To transform a conflict into a peaceful relationship requires effort, effort is expensive because it demands time, energy and willpower.

I ask who will provide the energy and willpower?

I believe one reason why conflict is on the increase in the community is that fewer people are prepared to pay the cost of reconciliation.

The natural outcome of conflict is more conflict in an ever-increasing escalation.

Peace makers are not always loved or valued.

Matthew 5:11 [NIV] *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

Jesus Christ, the great reconciler, was unable to bring peace to the city of Jerusalem despite his many attempts. In the end the Prince of Peace was murdered as a result of what He was trying to do.

To understand the present conflict we need to look at the past, go back to the beginning of the human life story.

From the earliest recorded times people have tried to explain the presence of conflict in this world.

Mythology and lore of many cultures explain human conflict as the conflict of the Gods spilling over into the lives of mortals.

The Judeo-Christian writings the Old and New Testaments of The Bible refer to a similar conflict taking place between spiritual powers and the humanity.

Ephesians 6:12 [NIV] *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

An unseen but a very real conflict in which we are “pawns”.

Isaiah 14:12-17 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“How did you come to fall from the heavens, daystar, son of dawn? [Lucifer – the prince of demons] How did you come to be thrown to the ground, conqueror of nations? You who used to think of yourself, I shall scale the heavens higher than the stars [angels] of God I shall set my throne. I shall sit on the Mount of Assembly [throne of God] far away to the north. I shall climb high above the clouds, I shall rival the Most High. Now you have been flung down to Sheol into the depths of the abyss! When they see you, they will scrutinise you and consider what you have become. Is this the man [created being] who made the world tremble who overthrew kingdoms? He made the world a desert, he levelled cities and never freed his prisoners to go home.”*

A rebellious event in heaven which results in conflict, fear, destruction and bondage of humanity.

We have in Satan a powerful embittered spirit being who is set on making life for humans a bitter conflict.

How does this defeated, bitter hearted being take his revenge on God’s created children?

Job 32:8 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“There is, you see, a spirit residing in humanity, the breath of God conferring intelligence.”*

The real conflict takes place in this human spirit that is in us. Most conflict originates within us, within our mind.

The onslaught on us by satanic powers is in the form of thoughts and attitudes of mind.

Ephesians 2:1-3 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“And you were dead, through the crimes and sins which used to make up your way of life when you were living by the principles of this world, the fullness of him, **the ruler who dominates the air**, the spirit who is at work in those who rebel. We too were all among them once, living only by our natural inclinations, obeying the demands of self-indulgence and our own whim.”*

The Greek word translated “air” [aer] means “to breathe unconsciously” – hence the life we lived and the principles of the world we followed we did so unconsciously, without really thinking about what we were doing.

James 4:1-2 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Is it not precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves? You want something because of envy and jealousy, and you lack it, so you kill. You have an ambition that you cannot satisfy, so you fight to get your way by force.”*

This inner conflict is the major source of mental, spiritual and physical sickness today.

The links between the physical and the psycho-spiritual states of an individual are only now being rediscovered by Western medicine.

James 4:3 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“It is because you do not pray that you will not believe, it is because you pray wrongly, wanting to indulge your passions.”*

James points us towards the key to overcoming all conflicts, a right relationship with our Creator God.

James 4:4-5, 7-9 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Do you not realise the love for the world is hatred for God? Anyone who chooses the world for a friend is constituted an enemy of God” ... “Give in to God, then resist the devil, and he will run away from you. The nearer you go to God the nearer God will come to you. Clean your minds you sinners and clear your minds, you waverers. Appreciate your wretchedness, and weep for it in misery. Your laughter must be turned to grief, your happiness to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.”*

James 4:6 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“God opposes the proud and He has given us an even greater grace and He accords His favour to the humble.”*

1 John 5:18 [Message Bible] *“We know that none of the God-begotten make a practice of sin, fatal sin. The God-begotten are also God-protected. The Evil One [Satan] cannot lay a hand on them. We know that we are held firm by God, it’s only the people of the world who continue in the grip of the Evil One.”*

This spirit that dominates this world’s society, Satan, is a proud spirit who opposes the purpose of the Creator God, and his passionate desire is for all humanity to follow his example and likewise become the enemies of God.

These silent and secret wars in our inner being will, if left unchecked, break out into open display of aggression towards others.

Genesis 4:1-16 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. ‘I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh,’ she said. She gave birth to a second child, Abel, the brother of Cain. Now Abel became a shepherd and kept flocks, while Cain tilled the soil. Time passed and Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as an offering for Yahweh, while Abel for his part brought the first-born of his flock and some of their fat as well. Yahweh looked with favour on Abel and his offering. But he did not look with favour on Cain and his offering, and Cain was very angry and downcast. Yahweh asked Cain, ‘Why are you angry and downcast? If you are doing right, surely you ought to hold your head high! But if you are not doing right, **Sin is crouching at the door hungry to get you. You can still master him.**’ Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out’. And while they were in the open country, Cain set on his brother Abel and killed him. Yahweh asked Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ ‘I do not know,’ he replied. **‘Am I my brother’s guardian?’** ‘What have you done?’ Yahweh asked. ‘Listen! Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground. Now be cursed and banned from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood at your hands. When you will the ground it will no longer yield up its strength to you. A restless wanderer you will be on earth.’ Cain then said to Yahweh, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear. Look, today you drive me from the surface of the earth. I must hide from you, and be a restless wanderer on earth. Why, whoever comes across me will kill me!’ ‘Very well, then,’ Yahweh replied, ‘whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ So Yahweh put a mark on Cain, so that no one coming across him would kill him. **Cain left Yahweh’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.**”*

Note certain things about the above events in the first naturally born generation, Adam and Eve’s first children.

a) Abel learnt from his parents who because of giving into the influence of Satan had *“done their own thing”* instead of obeying the Word of their Creator God and as a result were driven from the presence of God.

b) **Cain ignored this historical example and “did his own thing” and this led to jealousy. Cain then chose to leave the presence of his Creator God.**

Society as a whole has chosen the “way of Cain” ever since.

c) Cain did not consider himself as his “*brother’s guardian*”, such an attitude of mind prevailed in society from that time onwards.

My rights are more important to me than my responsibilities towards my fellow human beings.

Such an attitude leads to conflict and often death.

My rights conflict with your rights but I am stronger, so you must lose.

I am a woman, you are only an unwanted unborn child, so you lose your life by abortion.

Tragic statistics show that the most dangerous place to be today is in a mother’s womb!

I am a young man, you are only a geriatric burden on the family, so you are turned out of your home for others to care for you.

I am a whole, you are deformed, disabled or different, so I ignore your rights as a God-created human being.

One reason there is so little peace in the world today is that we use the wrong process to try to settle the differences between us.

It is valuable to start this study understanding the differences between various processes used widely today in an attempt to settle disputes.

The success rate of these processes are **not** very high.

Mediation

This process involves a third party.

Unable or unwilling to resolve their differences, people call in a third party who intervenes in the process and seeks to solve the conflict.

Such a mediator will have to qualify in certain ways.

- a) Be acceptable to both parties
- b) Have authority with both parties
- c) Be seen to be acting wisely and responsibly
- d) Be detached and objective
- e) Understand the positions and feelings of both parties
- f) Be skilled in the process of problem solving
- g) Have a high degree of interpersonal skills

Very few if any human beings could qualify in all of these personal skills.

If one or both parties detect a lack of these qualifications in the mediator, the process will most likely break down.

Mediation is only concerned with bringing extreme positions taken to middle ground acceptable to both.

The goal is **not** reconciliation.

Arbitration

This is only concerned with judging between the position of two parties and seeking to bring about a “fair” solution, that will be binding on both parties.

Arbitration is not assertive, since we are required to surrender our rights and needs to the judgement of a third party.

This is often a lose/lose process at the end of which the parties may be **no** closer together.

This is **not** reconciliation in any form.

Negotiation

This is basically a power game and does not lead to reconciliation. This only leads to a win for the most able, skilful or powerful party.

Information is the ammunition used in negotiations. If you know the other party’s needs or weaknesses, you can use this to exploit them to achieve your own goals.

No matter who wins the relationship will suffer. This is **not** reconciliation.

Conciliation

Conciliation assumes to start with that reconciliation is impossible and that the best that can be achieved is to minimise the damage done to conflicting parties.

All a conciliator can do is bring both parties to agree on the least damaging process as the two parties separate to do their own thing.

This process only covers financial and resources of both parties as they separate for example in a marriage breakdown.

Reconciliation is **not** taken into consideration.

The summary of these processes is as follows:

Arbitration – seeks fairness through judgement

Mediation – seeks common ground

Negotiation – hopes for one winner but generally both lose

Conciliation – assumes both parties will lose

In all of these processes reconciliation is rarely the outcome.

Why is this?

The simple one word answer is selfishness.

The roots of conflict are a self-seeking attitude of mind.

We seek to impose our aims and beliefs on others.

We strive to advance our position and power without consideration for the needs of others.

Society cannot survive by mutual exploitation, we live in too small and fragile a world for us to ignore or steal from our neighbours.

What then will bring about lasting reconciliation?

We will now seek to answer this question.

Matthew 5:9 [NIV] *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*

Part of our title as a child of God is *“peacemaker”*.

Note it says *“peacemaker”* **not** *“peacelover”*!

Romans 12:18 [NIV] *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

Note it is our total involvement that is commanded by God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 [NIV] *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*

Linked with being a peace maker is our job, delegated by God, to preach reconciliation and to be willing to lay down our lives [in service] to bring about reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21 [NIV] *“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Before we can be a peacemaker or perform our job of reconciliation, we ourselves have to be reconciled to God by accepting the death of His Son Jesus Christ as a substitute to our own deserved death, the end result of our sins.

Peacemaking and reconciliation can be likened to gluing back together a priceless vase that was dropped and shattered.

To perform such a task certain thoughts and feelings must be foremost in our minds.

- a) The relationship that has been shattered by conflict is considered to be beyond price.
- b) Allocating of blame will **not** help in any way to restore the relationship.
- c) **Personal sacrifice will be needed by all involved in the conflict that is to be resolved.**
- d) Realise that peacemaking is a high-risk business, the forces that seek to divide and destroy must **not** be underestimated.
- e) Peacemaking and reconciliation is a team effort, the lone peacemaker is too vulnerable to survive long.

Society is proof of the desperate need for reconciliation in the world today.

The reconciliation can only happen if we tackle it at its source, the reconciliation of ourselves with our Creator God. All other efforts have proved in the past to be futile and will continue to be ineffective.

Reconciliation must start with each of us individually being reconciled to our Creator God.

The cost of peacemaking can be high, too high to be paid alone.

Peacemakers need support, a network of friends and partners in peace who will provide the care, maintenance and energy renewal needed by those who stand in the front line of the battle to bring about reconciliation.

Matthew 22:39 [NIV] “... *love your neighbour as you love yourself.*”

Jesus Christ gave this as the key to reconciliations but preceded it with something even more important to enable us to fulfil this command.

Matthew 22:37-38 [NIV] “*Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.*”

What Jesus Christ our Creator and Saviour is saying is **we were not created for self, we were created for relationships.**

Relationship with our Creator God and relationships with our fellow human beings.

To remain in conflict with God or our fellow human beings will damage us socially, spiritually, mentally and physically.

Selfishness leads to fear.

Fear we might not win.

Fear even worse that we might lose.

Fear that those around us are more powerful in their selfishness.

Fear of what they will do to us.

Fear clouds our thinking and leads to a sense of worthlessness, unworthiness and a loss of peace in our lives.

Such a condition leads to our being locked into a cycle of selfishness. Anxiety and phobias take over our lives.

A loss of self-esteem leads us into depression and can lead to developing a persecution complex.

The end product is a loss of the sense of reality, becoming withdrawn and burnout.

Remember in conflicts there are no. “Innocent parties” both are guilty in attempting to pursue their own goals at the expense of the other.

There are no saints in the conflict business.

Both parties are allowing the selfish “*beast*”, the “*sinner*”, the “*old man*” or the “*flesh*” to dominate.

All the above titles are used in God’s handbook for reconciliation [The Holy Christian Bible].

There are five common ways in which the selfish “*beast*” in us will show itself.

1 We project our selfish “*beast*” on to the other party.

We say “*you are the one who is losing your temper.*”

2 Transfer the blame for the lack of control we have over our selfish “*beast*” onto others.

We say “*it is your fault I am losing my temper.*”

3 Rationalising our selfish “*beastlike*” behaviour.

We say “*any reasonable person could be excused for losing their temper in a situation like this is.*”

4 To suppress this selfish “*beast*” in me I need to lock it away and banish it from my conscious thinking.

We say “*let us change the subject.*”

5 Deny that we have any selfish “*beast*” at all.

We say “*I have not lost my temper!*”

How do we tame this selfish “*beast*” and start out on the pathway to reconciliation?

Mark 5:8-9 [NIV] “*For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!” Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.”*”

Often the first step that Jesus Christ took when dealing with an evil spirit was to demand the spirit’s name.

We have to admit we have a selfish “*beast*” within us, name ourselves for what we really are, selfish.

Matthew 6:13 [NIV] “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*”

Included in the example prayer given to us by our Saviour was a prayer for deliverance from the evil one.

It is important to remember that evil is not only “*out there*” but is also “*in*” each of us, it is called the “*flesh*”.

Romans 13:14 [King James] “*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*”

Or the “*old man*”.

Romans 6:6 [King James] “*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*”

This evil within us has to die.

Romans 3:23 [King James] “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*”

We have to realise we are sinners in God’s sight.

Powerful help is at hand to assist us to deal with is selfish “*beast*” within us.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] “*If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*”

The very creative power of the godhead is available to help us.

John 16:13 [NIV] *“But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

We can be led by the Holy Spirit into all truth.

John 16:8 [Message Bible] *“When He [the Holy Spirit] comes He will expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness and judgement.”*

We will be able to understand the selfish “beast” and deal with it.

John 14:17 [NIV] *“the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

The Holy Spirit will not only walk with us. If we invite Him, He will come in us and direct our lives. Such an intimate relationship will allow some of His characteristics to “rub off” on us.

Galatians 5:22-23 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

Note one of these “fruits” of this intimate relationship is “self-control”.

Allowing us to eradicate the acts or “fruits” of our sinful nature.

Galatians 5:19-21 [NIV] *“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

Among this list is “discord”, “selfish ambitions” and “dissensions” the root and fruit of conflict.

It is only in God’s Word that we can find reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:20 [NIV] *“... we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”*

Colossians 1:21 [NIV] *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.”*

In our evil past we all were the enemies of God, in desperate need of reconciliation, that is a massive change in our relationship with God, to become friends of God.

John 15:14-17 [NIV] *“You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”*

This friendship is made possible by two acts, both acts of reconciliation.

John 15:13 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

Jesus Christ did this as God’s part in bringing about reconciliation between us and Himself.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Out of His un-measurable love for His created human beings God sacrificed the life of His own Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, enemies of God, to become friends of God.

God has fulfilled His part in bringing about reconciliation, what is our part?

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Because of what in His great mercy and love for us God has done in and through Jesus Christ, our response needs to be to follow His example and lay down our own lives in a *“living sacrifice”*.

How do we do this?

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

By a total change of mind, Paul then specifies certain attitudes that must change in our lives.

Romans 12:3 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“... I say to every one of you, never pride yourself on being better than you really are, but think of yourself dispassionately, recognising that God has given to each one his measure of faith.”*

Be humble, realise we are **not** ‘God’s gift’ to other people, but sinners needing God’s mercy as are all other human beings.

Romans 12:10 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“... in brotherly love let your feeling of deep affection for one another come to expression and regard others as more important than yourselves.”*

1 Corinthians 13:7 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“It [love] is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.”*

As we can see by the above scriptures our response to God reconciling Himself to us through the sacrificial death of His Only Son, is to seek to reconcile ourselves to other fellow human beings when conflict arises in our relationships.

Jesus Christ gave us the perfect example of humbling Himself to express His love for us.

Philippians 2:5 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“... make your mind the mind of Jesus Christ who being in the form of God did not count equality with God as something to be grasped. But He emptied Himself taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are and being in every way like a human being, He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.”*

We are to follow this example.

Philippians 2:1-4 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“So if in Christ there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any warmth or sympathy. I appeal to you, make my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity, instead pursuing not selfish interests but those of others.”*

Reconciliation is a total change of relationship and the Holy Scriptures give us Ten Commandments for reconciliation between us and our fellow human beings.

1 The initiative is ours

To reconcile us to Himself, God took the initiative and sent Jesus the Christ to make reconciliation possible. In reconciliation with other human beings **we** are to take the initiative.

Matthew 5:23-24 [NIV] *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”*

God will not accept our offering ourselves as a *“living sacrifice”* if we have **not** reconciled ourselves with our fellow human beings.

Matthew 18:15 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.”*

A recipe for reconciliation.

So often we hear the words *“well, don’t expect me to do anything. It’s his fault.”*

We all like to feel we are the injured party, but really both of us are injured when there is no reconciliation, for God has put **our** reconciliation with Him *“on hold”*.

2 Act now

The breakdown of relationships is viewed seriously in The Bible.

The longer a conflict remains unresolved the greater the damage to the relationship.

1 John 2:11 [NIV] *“But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”*

Unresolved relationships disturb our inner peace because it affects our own relationship with God. Unresolved relationships can affect future generations, we have many such examples in the world. Conflict that was generated between groups of people still festers 100s of years later.

3 Keep our own peace

John 14:27 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Peace I [Jesus Christ speaking] bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give. This is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”*

How do we receive this peace from Jesus Christ?

2 Timothy 1:7 [King James] *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*

Lack of fear comes from the Holy Spirit within us.

Ephesians 4:30-31 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with His seal, ready for the day we will be set free. Any bitterness or bad temper or anger or shouting or abuse must be far removed from you, as must every kind of malice.”*

We only have an active Holy Spirit working in us when we are free of these harmful attitudes of mind that are the root of conflicts and show need for reconciliation with other people.

4 Share our peace

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation, the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God’s work. He reconciled us to Himself through Christ and He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not holding anyone’s faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God.”*

God desires to preach the message of reconciliation to this world by our own example of loving reconciliation within the Christian fellowship.

John 13:35 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognise you as my disciples.”*

Sadly, Christians have become more associated with internal divisions than external peacemaking through reconciliation.

5 Confess our part

Conflict hurts both parties therefore both sides need individual healing in addition to the healing of the relationship. Healing from anger, resentment and fear.

During the process of reconciliation, each party needs to experience inner reconciliation towards God and towards themselves.

Romans 7:21, 24 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“So I find this rule, that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God, thanks be to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Paul experienced this hurt that conflict can bring on us but also showed us the healing process, confession.

To say “I was wrong, I should not have done what I did” is the first step towards individual inner healing.

1 John 1:8-9 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“If we say, we have no sin we are deceiving ourselves and the truth has no place in us. If we acknowledge our sins He [God] is trustworthy and upright, so that He will forgive our sins and will cleanse us from all evil.”*

In conflict both parties have acted wrongly and both parties have been hurt. Both parties have also injured each other so both parties need to confess. A one-sided confession will **not** bring about reconciliation. To say we are wrong, to admit we are part of what created the conflict is not easy, we make ourselves vulnerable.

But our main concern must be to restore peace and hope for a new future.

Reconciliation requires us to admit to how we are guilty, **not** how it is, conflict.

6 Relinquish conflict

Reconciliation does not follow automatically from confession, it follows from repentance.

Acts 2:38 [New Jerusalem Bible] “... every one of you must repent and be baptised into the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

What does it mean to repent?

The key is to understand the meaning behind the baptism that is linked to repentance in this scripture, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a gift to influence our life after baptism.

Romans 6:2-11 [New Jerusalem Bible] “... when we were baptised into Jesus Christ, we were baptised into His death ... we were buried with Him ... we should begin a new life ... realising that our former self was crucified with Him ... dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.”

Baptism is symbolic of the death of our own way of life.

Repentance is a total change in what motivates our thoughts and actions in life. Our focus is away from self and outward towards our Creator God and fellow human beings, as we have seen in previous scriptures.

Our major concern becomes the damage our actions have done to others in this conflict.

7 Forgive those whose actions against us and our selfish unfeeling response that brought about the conflict

Forgiveness is a three way process, it involves God, ourselves and others involved in conflict.

All conflict has its roots in selfishness.

Self before God, and self before others.

Matthew 6:12 [Good News Bible] “Forgive us the wrongs we have done as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.”

It is a great incentive to realise that our sins [wrongs] that we have done against our Creator will be forgiven in the same measure [“as we”] that we forgive others!

1 John 1:9 [New Jerusalem Bible] “If we acknowledge our sins, He [God] is trustworthy and upright so that He will forgive our sins.”

Accept God’s forgiveness after our acknowledging our wrongs.

James 5:16 [New Jerusalem Bible] “... confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another to be cured. The heartfelt prayer of someone upright works very powerfully.”

Guidance for spiritual healing as well as physical healing.

Confessing to the other person in the conflict that we were wrong and asking for forgiveness is a powerful tool in reconciliation.

Especially when it follows our own prayers to God for **our** forgiveness and favour in the eyes of those who have wronged.

To forgive we must be prepared to honestly face the past, recognise the hurt and be committed to a new loving relationship in the future.

8 Keep the conflict contained

Conflicts can run out of control if they are not contained and limited to the original parties.

Our instant, but unwise, reaction when a conflict erupts is to seek others to support our side of the conflict.

Such an action can cause the conflict to begin to run out of control and become a major event instead of a minor difference of opinion.

Matthew 18:15 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother.”*

There is always the risk that a conflict shared is a conflict doubled.

Proverbs 17:9 [Amplified Bible] *“He who covers and forgives an offence seeks love, but he who repeats or harps on a matter separates even close friends.”*

Containment is brought about by confidentiality.

The temptation to pull in support from as many quarters as possible when we are threatened by conflict must be resisted if reconciliation is to be the end result.

1 Corinthians 13:5 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“Love ... never seeks its own advantage, it does take offence or store up grievances.”*

Confine our thoughts and words to the one difference involved at the moment, do **not** bring up old grievances to add to the conflict.

We only store up old grievances with the idea of using them to our advantage in future conflicts, that is **not** loving.

9 Listen

All too often our mind is so full of our own hurts that we fail to hear the hurts of others in the conflict.

When it comes to peacemaking and reconciliation some of us do not stop declaring our own rights and interests long enough to hear what others are saying.

God made us with two ears but only one mouth, we need to listen at least twice as much as we speak to resolve any conflict.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 [NIV] *“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”*

10 Focus on our own faults

There is never an innocent party in a conflict, we all have a share in any conflict. **Be open and willing to share the shame and blame for the conflict.**

To admit our own failing is one way to reduce the hostile defensiveness of other people.

Romans 3:23 [New Jerusalem Bible] *“No distinction is made, all have sinned and lack God’s glory.”*

We all are in the same boat, we all lack the righteousness and perfect character that is our Creator God.

2 Peter 3:18 [NIV] *“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*

Accepting God’s gracious forgiveness through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ will reconcile us to our Creator God, but this must grow in us by being extended to other human beings by forgiving them and being reconciled to them. Only then will come peace on earth.