

# **Conflict Resolution**

**A Biblical Approach To Dealing With Conflict**

**Wednesday Night Bible Study**

At

**First Baptist Church**

# *Lesson 1*

## **Conflict Resolution**

### **Is Anger and Conflict Hindering Your Spiritual Growth?**

Love is the supreme value in the kingdom of God. Anger and conflict block out love. There is probably no greater challenge to spiritual growth than how you handle anger and conflict.

*"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."*

*-- Matthew 18:15*

#### **Seven steps to resolving conflict:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

**Discussion of the steps:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_.

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

True or False

*The best way to handle anger is to ventilate it.*

6. \_\_\_\_\_

## The Landscaping Disaster

Dear Pastor,

I understand that you are developing some expertise in handling conflict within the church. I could really use some advice on how to handle a dispute that has recently arisen in our church.

It all started when Tom and Nancy Gardner became concerned about the poor landscaping in front of the church. Several bushes had died, leaving unsightly gaps, and the flower beds were trampled and disorganized. The deacons told the Gardners that Margaret, another member of the church, had donated \$200 to help pay for new landscaping, and four other families donated another \$350. Tom and Nancy planned a new landscaping layout, ordered all of the plants and materials, and recruited some high school students to help them with the work.

The night before they were to put in the new plants, one of the deacons called the Gardners to tell them that Margaret was very upset that she had been left out of their planning.

She had her own ideas about what kind of plants to use, and she had told the deacons that she could get substantial discounts through a relative at a local greenhouse.

When Tom called Margaret to clear up the problem, she was rude and sarcastic.

The more he tried to reason with her, the more irritated she became. Tom lost his temper and spoke sharply to her, at which point she hung up on him.

When Margaret met with her Bible study group the next morning, she asked, "Can we please pray for Tom Gardner? He really needs help with his temper and his desire to control other people." Someone asked her what prompted her request, and she gave a lengthy description of the situation. A couple of friends sympathized with her and alluded to similar encounters with Tom. One of the women felt very uncomfortable about the discussion, but she hated to get involved in conflict, so she decided to keep quiet. "Besides," she thought, "this will probably blow over."

Another woman in the group told a friend about the problem, however, and he passed the news on to Tom. Tom and Nancy were so furious that they got on two phones and called me, demanding that I confront Margaret for her malicious slander. When I seemed hesitant to come to their defense, some of their past frustrations toward me boiled over. They said, "You've never been willing to stand up to people like Margaret. I guess we'd better find a church where the pastor has some courage." With that, they hung up on me. I think I know what I should do, but when I discussed the situation with the deacons, they felt I was on the wrong track and would only make things worse. We all respect you a great deal, and we would appreciate your advice on the following questions.

1. Which of the people I have mentioned have done anything wrong?  
(Please list us by name and describe our errors; if you can think of any key Bible passages we violated, please refer to them as well.)
  
2. Some of our leaders think we should just let this blow over.  
(The Gardners have a history of making angry threats, but then they calm down and everyone seems to be able to forget about it.)  
  
What do you think we should do?  
(Please point me to relevant Bible passages.)
  
3. What could we do in the future to prevent a conflict like this from developing in the first place?

Thanks for taking time to help us out. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours in Christ,  
John Smith

## **The Inheritance**

Dear Deacon,

I just got off the phone with our good friend John, and he told me that you gave him some very helpful advice on how to deal with a conflict in his church. Well, I'm also faced with a difficult situation, and I would appreciate your advice as well.

The dispute involves three siblings, two of whom are members of our church. Three months ago, Sam, Bill and Ann lost their Uncle Ben to a heart attack. (Sam and Bill are members of our church, and Ann goes to another local church.) Ben, who had never had any children, had been ill for some time. Shortly before he died, he amended his will so that Sam would receive his four-wheel drive Chevy Suburban and a valuable western sculpture. When the will was read, Bill hit the ceiling. He had wanted the Suburban because it would seat his family of six more comfortably than would his present Ford Explorer. Ann was also upset because she had always dreamed of getting the western sculpture.

The dispute worsened the next day when they discovered that the value of some stock left to Bill and Ann had dropped by 30% the previous week. According to the will, Sam will receive the Suburban (worth \$15,000) and the western sculpture (worth \$5,000). Bill will receive stock that was worth \$15,000 at the time the will was amended, but is now worth \$10,000. Ann will receive the same amount of stock. In addition, each of them will receive one-third of the remainder of Ben's estate, which consists of various items of personal property (worth about \$15,000) and \$18,000 cash.

To make matters even more complicated, Ann came across a handwritten note in her uncle's desk. The note said: "Suburban, \$12,000; sculpture, \$3000". No one knows why Ben underestimated the value of the Suburban and the sculpture, but an appraisal clearly shows that their value is, and has been for several months, \$15,000 and \$5,000, respectively.

Bill was furious when he learned that his brother's inheritance is so much more valuable than his. He publicly accused Sam of exerting undue influence over Ben in order to get the truck and the sculpture. As a result of Bill's accusations, Ann also questioned Sam's integrity. Like Bill, she expressed her thoughts to other people in the community. Both Ann and Bill argued that Ben's handwritten notes show that he had never intended to give Sam \$10,000 more in value than he willed to them. Therefore, they said Sam should give up his share in the \$18,000 and allow them to have it. Otherwise, Bill threatened to contest the will, which would tie it up in court for months.

Their entire family is being affected by the dispute. Their parents (who are also members of our church) are deeply distressed by the conflict and don't know what to say. Ann and Bill's spouses are not speaking to Sam's wife. Even their children are upset because of what they have heard about the dispute at home. In fact, when Bill's ten-year-old son called Sam a cheat, Sam's son got into a fist fight with him. Family friends have tried to keep their distance.

Our church is also being affected. Gossip is spreading, people are taking up sides, and even my church officers cannot agree on who is right and who is wrong. I've talked with Sam, and he says he would like to restore peace in the family, but he needs his share of the \$18,000 cash to help pay for his daughter's college tuition. He would also like to get possession of the Suburban as soon as possible, so he can go to the mountains with his wife and two children before the summer is over. He has been dreaming of getting a four-wheel drive vehicle for years. Therefore, he is really upset about the accusations and demands Bill and Ann are raising.

The conflict grew even worse yesterday when Sam lost a contract for his business that would have produced a net profit of about \$5,000. It appears that his client had heard some of the gossip Bill had been spreading and decided not to give his business to Sam. To top it off, Sam ran into some mutual friends who repeated to him some of Bill's accusations. Sam exploded and said, "Those are rotten lies! Bill has been greedy all his life, and he just can't stand the thought of me getting something he wants. In fact, I'll bet he tried to get Uncle Ben to give him the truck, and he's just mad that Ben didn't give in.

As for my sister, she never showed any interest in that sculpture until the will was read. The only reason she wants it is because she can't have it. That's pretty typical of her. I'll be darned if I'll let them push me around!" That makes this conflict especially painful is the fact that Sam, Bill, and Ann were close all of their lives. Bill helped Sam through some tough financial times several years ago. Even before that, Sam had always admired Bill for his active involvement in a community youth program. Bill still devotes many weekends to taking troubled teenagers hiking in the mountains.

Moreover, Sam met his wife, Sally, through a blind date that Ann arranged when they were in college. All of these close ties are now being damaged as the three of them fight over their uncle's estate. Sam says that his lawyer, Chuck, has told him that the amended will would probably withstand a court challenge, which means Sam would get the Suburban and the sculpture, plus one third of the personal property and \$6,000 cash. Chuck also told him that he might win a lawsuit against Bill for slander and the loss of the contract.

My elders are warning me to stay out of this situation because we might divide the church further and even alienate some of our largest donors. It would sure be easy to say, "This is a problem than only attorneys can sort out." But I have a nagging doubt about whether that is the most biblical thing to do. Therefore, I would appreciate it if you would give me some advice on the following questions. (Since I may have to persuade my elders to do something they are not presently inclined to do, please refer to any key scriptures that support your counsel.)

1. Since there are legal issues involved, shouldn't the church stay out of it?  
Why or why not?
2. What problems might we encounter if we do not get involved?  
What if we do get involved?
3. If the church does get involved, what kind of a process should we attempt to follow, especially if some of the parties do not cooperate or listen to our advice right away?
4. What biblical principles do we need to teach the parties to think about and practice as they try to resolve this dispute?
5. What if some of my elders do not immediately buy into the process you recommend?  
  
How do I persuade them that this is the right thing to do?
6. What could we do to prevent similar problems of this magnitude in the future?
7. I know that other pastors in our community encounter serious conflicts from time to time, and most of them do not seem to be any better prepared for them than we are. What could I do to help my fellow shepherds improve their ability to prevent and/or resolve these kinds of problems?