

St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX -- July 18, 2021 -- Kneeling Before God

Ephesians 2:11-22 When you look at families, church families, or work groups, the issue of conflict is never too far away. The only peaceful place is heaven. We know there are terrorists wanting to end our lives. There are woke people who want to cancel us if we don't believe what they do. We would like heaven on earth where the risk is low, but it is not what Jesus gave. He said, "I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Just look at the news and you see conflict daily.

The crux of conflict resolution for Christians is kneeling before God and seeking what He wants. When we get tied up in our own egos and our pride, we have just walked away from Jesus. If you have truly died with Christ through your baptism and, as Luther said, buried the old Adam daily, there is no room pride. Consider vv 8 and 9 of our text where Paul writes: 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

According to Dr. Lloyd Rediger, conflict in the church is normal. But incivility and abuse are not. Conflict actually has benefits. Conflict keeps communication open and honest; it promotes authenticity by recognizing diversity; it teaches us how to be a community of faith rather than an artificially homogenous group. It also helps us keep learning and being creative.

The steps he mentions are 1) To jointly kneel before Christ 2) decide how concerns in conflict are to be handled so there is some objectivity, and 3) talk only to the person with whom you have a problem rather than behind his or her back.

Terry Germann is a Lutheran conflict manager and he sees the following scriptural approaches and creative conflict resolution.

A. Scriptural Approaches

1. Be direct-defining yourself to the other person, not defining the other person as Jesus says in Matthew 18:5 "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back."

Where you (action), I feel (feeling). What I want is (action)

The Blame cutter is the question-what do other people feel about this?

2. Take the first step as a response of maturity, Jesus said, 23 "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God." (Matthew 5)

3. Speak the 'whole truth' in love Paul wrote: (Eph.4:15) "15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church."

4. Admit our part in the problem which is addressed by John in his first letter (1) "8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."

5. James (1:19) says in his letter: "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."

B. Creative Conflict Resolution

1. Identify the issue (define the problem)
2. Focus on issues and not personalities
3. Explore ALL options and possible answers. Search for clarity.
 - a) Either/or is the great enemy of possible solutions
 - b) Consider all possible consequences-positive and negative of each decision
 - c) Create flexibility in thinking and creativity in decision making
4. Use objective standards of evaluation such as consistency with teaching of Bible, creeds, confession, Core values such as Pastor Priem wrote in the newsletter a couple of months back. There were:

Christ Centered - We confess the apostolic faith in Jesus Christ according to the Holy Scriptures. We affirm the authority of the Scriptures as the authoritative source and norm, “according to which all doctrines should and must be judged” (Formula of Concord). We accept the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as true witnesses to the Word of God.

Mission Driven - We believe that the mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel and to make disciples for Christ. We believe that making disciples — in our congregations, in our communities and nations, and around the world — must be a priority of the Church in the present age.

Traditionally Grounded - We affirm the ecumenical creeds and the faithful witness of the Church across time and space. We endorse the form and practices of the universal Church that are consistent with Scripture, particularly the office of the ministry and the tradition of worship under Word and Sacrament. We seek dialogue and fellowship with other Lutheran churches and with faithful Christians of other confessions.

Congregationally Focused - We strive to be a church that is organized to facilitate the ministries of local congregations in a posture of servanthood and a spirit of partnership, through the provision of resources, connections and information.

According to Rediger, conflict can be both useful and debilitating. It is real, persistent and sometimes mean. Conflict can be normal, abnormal or spiritual. It can escalate into abuse and inflict collateral damage. It can be managed poorly or well. Effective conflict management is not yet the norm in congregations or synods.

Three types of conflict were mentioned by Rediger in churches, but could apply to home or the workplace as well.

Normal conflict is due to diversity when normally functioning persons with different personality types interact. Some personality types are passive aggressive, some aggressive, and some may tend to manipulate. Some are frustrated and others attitude challenged liking to stir things up. This is normal conflict according to Rediger.

What about **abnormal conflict**? This differs from normal conflict because at least one of the conflict participants suffers from a major mental or personality disorder. Disorders that appear often in abnormal conflicts are anti social, borderline, paranoid, schizoid or narcissistic personalities, and those altered by chemical abuse. Management and resolution methods need to take this into account.

inally, **spiritual conflict** is represented by those who resort to sinful tactics without remorse and can even be characterized as evil. Rediger says of this: “We need to learn to listen, forgive, be patient, and celebrate diversity. Yet we must also be prophetic in the Biblical sense of identifying evil and

fighting to rid ourselves of its influence and consequences.” Evil is not the same as mental disorders. Evil is taken very seriously by the Bible and by Jesus in particular. Remember, Jesus did not try rational solutions for evil.

In the Jerry Cook book, Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness, he writes, “Sometimes people get offended with one another or they get offended at the pastor or church leaders. These situations need immediate attention or they tend to get worse. Often the problem is spiritual in its origins. The Bible says, ‘Great peace have they who love Your law and nothing shall offend them...’ (Ps.119:165) A person who is easily offended apparently does love God’s law very much. Offenses unresolved tend to harden into bitterness and to spread to other people. The individual believer who is offended should take steps to resolve the matter himself. Paul said, He should ‘make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness, no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.’ (12:14-15)

In the last analysis, an offended person must deal with the problem himself because if he chooses to be offended, no solution imposed or no appeal from others can pacify him. As Scripture says, ‘An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.’ (Prov.18:19) About all we can do with people who are offended is appeal to them. ... He went on to quote Paul to Titus (3:9-11) *But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.* We are not to enter into debate with schismatics. Not that there is no room for people of good faith to discuss or even disagree on issues. But if a person is habitually ‘gendering strifes” (2 Tim.2:23), causing confusion, and sowing discord, he must not be allowed to continue. You can identify a schismatic by the backwash in people’s lives. He touches one person and that person becomes confused. He touches someone else and that one is angry with this one. In his wake, the schismatic leaves all kinds of confusion and strife. He is a troublemaker. Sometimes, Cook says, these people are not aware of what they are doing. They don’t realize what effect they are having on people. That’s why Scripture says to warn them once and again. We see that a lot of that in the woke society and cancel culture today.

Cook, in their second conversation with a divisive person, he said, ‘One of two things can happen now: you can stop it or you can leave. You must decide whether your fellowship in this Body is of enough value to you to stop what you are doing and begin to relate rightly. You decide and I’ll call you to learn what your decision is.’ The person to whom Cook said that responded well. He really needed to get some things straightened out in his life. Cook referred him to a counselor who worked through his problems with him and he found healing.

We are talking about conflict in church, but as important as spiritual issues are, you’re in church once a week. But the workaday world is five days a week-at least. What about conflict in the workplace? We can’t appeal to the common kneeling before Christ and the fact that in our baptism, we have died with Christ and may have to do some more dying. Creative Conflict Resolution steps mentioned earlier can help.

You can always use expressions like *Where you (action), I feel (feeling). What I want is (action)* In short, you can try to be a redemptive presence, make it better because you are there. If it takes eating humble pie, you need to remind yourself that you have died with Christ and are only here now

as a servant to others in His Name. The work place has its own built in conflict resolution channels in many cases. Because of the chain of authority, it may be a simple judgment by a superior in that chain.

But that is not so when it comes to marriage and the family. Conflicts in families give rise to divorce, abuse and alienation when not worked out. Many of our young people don't have good models or training in working out difficulties. Seeing a counselor is not a matter of shame but of getting the help you need.

Marriage and family are where we live. Even if you are no longer raising kids at home and they are grown up, you are still parents. You still care and are in many ways more helpless to intervene. When it's your child's marriage, to intervene is to interfere. We need to look at our motives and read a good book on co-dependency, which is trying to do for others what they need to do for themselves.

Walter Wangerin's book *AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE* is a reminder of the importance of forgiveness and intimacy in marriage. It is also a reminder that one can fall in love with one's work and invest emotional energy there that should be going into the marriage. Many people put pressure on their spouse to be God-like, to guess what they need as if they can read minds of others. Conflict with children, if unresolved, is important to get counseling for. Because when you work through a problem and it's mostly a win-win solution, or at least a compromise, you have one more building block in a future better relationship. You are learning to use tools that are redemptive and helpful and not destructive and divisive.

Christ's work on the cross transformed the condition of the Gentiles bringing peace to Jewish and Gentile believers. The result of believing the message of Christ is people being treated as equals. The Apostles and prophets' teaching is the foundation where the Ephesian believers could build. But key to that foundation is Christ as cornerstone, keystone, the stone on which all else depends.

The church is described in our text as living and growing. The NIV translation says, *21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.*

The Gospel breaks down religious and social barriers when we let it. We can be the ones who get in the way and actually support conflict to defend our comfort levels. But since we are in Christ, every Christian's relationship to other Christians needs to be brotherly or sisterly in the best possible way.

It's unfortunate that people see conflict in a church as a judgment against the church and never darken the door again. That becomes their excuse in the future based on their experience and so they choose to write off the church, while maintaining perhaps a belief in God. So, you might ask yourself: How can you show God's love to an 'outsider' this week. What can you do to support conflict resolution in church, work or family? Then you can expand it outwards and ask what dividing wall in our world would you like to see come down. Christ has destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people unless we keep hostility and division alive. We can get in the way of the Kingdom but God holds us accountable for that.

Working with conflicts can take risks for us to share with others our concerns or hurts so that Satan doesn't have a foot in the door of the church, family or work place. St. Paul said not to let the sun go down on our anger. To be angry but sin not. God grant us faithfulness as we hold fast to Jesus and speak the truth in love as we deal with differences in life, kneeling before God, growing in grace. Amen