

### III. CAUSES OF CONFLICT



Mix two or more people together and you have a montage of differing personalities, priorities, perceptions, and preferences ... a concoction ripe for *conflict*. Often the result is fingers pointed in accusation rather than hands shaking in agreement. Random words of blessing can be quickly eaten up by words of bitterness.

Conflict was experienced by the first family God created ... conflict among Adam and Eve and their offspring ... and it is still being experienced in homes today, as well as in workplaces and churches and among nations. Who hasn't at times wanted to throw their hands up in the air and exclaim, "Why can't we all just get along?" *Well, we can*—with the empowerment of God and through our obedience to Him. His Word provides principles for peace that can bring about the supernatural result of reconciliation and resolution, from the board room to the bedroom.

*"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."  
(1 Thessalonians 5:11)*

#### A. Why Are Some People Attackers and Others Avoiders?

Everyone has it ... no one wants it ... no one can escape it! What is *it*? One common denominator for us all is *conflict*. But where does it come from? People are who they are and act the way they act as a result of a combination of factors.

- **Natural temperament or personality types**

- You were born with a natural bent toward being outgoing or reserved, compliant or defiant, aggressive or passive.
- Your temperament/personality traits can work to your advantage or disadvantage depending on whether you learn to use them productively in resolving conflicts or destructively in creating conflicts.

*“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” (2 Corinthians 3:5)*

- **Early childhood experiences**

- You were deeply influenced by your early family relationships through words you heard and behaviors you saw that gave you messages about “who you are” and “what you do” and how to respond to conflict.
- You can change the assumptions you adopted about yourself and about conflict resolution that are influencing your behavior today by identifying the messages you received growing up in your family and evaluating them as to whether they are helpful or harmful.

*“Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good.” (Job 34:4)*

- **Physical factors**

- You were born with certain physical characteristics such as brain chemistry that may be affecting the way you respond to the rush of adrenaline experienced during times of conflict.
- You can have a thorough medical checkup. When experiencing a conflict, you may even want to have an evaluation about brain chemistry. Did you know that you can learn ways to actually change the chemistry of your brain if it is causing you problems in conflict resolution?

*“He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.” (Psalm 107:20)*

- **Learned behaviors**

- You may have *unintentionally* learned patterns of responding to conflict by following the example of significant people in your life and may be subconsciously modeling your behavior after those who either attack or avoid conflict.
- You can *intentionally* unlearn a behavior pattern by determining to learn new behaviors and by modeling yourself after people who embrace conflicts as a fact of life and who find ways of productively resolving them.

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.” (Proverbs 1:5)*

## B. What Are the Unmet Needs That Drive Attackers and Avoiders?

We are all created with three God-given inner needs—the need for love, for significance, and for security. These needs can be translated into the need to feel heard and understood, to feel encouraged and at peace, to feel affirmed and accepted, to feel confident and courageous. Or these needs can be negatively translated into the need to feel superior. Unmet needs can become the driving force behind why we act the way we act when we are faced with a conflict. The challenge, of course, is to find a way to get our legitimate needs met legitimately rather than illegitimately, and that can be accomplished only through a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

*“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”  
(2 Peter 1:3)*

### Attackers Feel Insignificant

- **Wolves** ... have a goal to feel *powerful*.
  - Children who grow up feeling insignificant within their families typically become driven by the need to feel significant. This drive can result in finding destructive ways of meeting this need.
  - Children who feel powerless can develop aggressive tactics to overpower others. These newly developed *wolves* become fiercely competitive in order to feel like true “winners” ... they become dictatorial in order to feel powerful. Thus, their need to feel *significant* is met temporarily.
- **Serpents** ... have a goal to feel *superior*.
  - Children who grow up regularly experiencing “put-downs” and are the target of belittling comments may become driven by the need to overcome feelings of inferiority.
  - Children who feel inferior can become behind-the-scene backbiters. These newly developed serpents spread poisonous rumors in order to feel superior to others ... temporarily.
- **Hornets** ... have a goal to feel *valuable*.
  - Children who grow up being told that “children are to be seen but not heard” or whose opinions and feelings are virtually discounted typically may become driven by the need to be valuable ... to be heard and understood.
  - Children who don’t feel valuable typically can develop a negative attitude. Making constant complaints is a way to get the ear of others, leaving

these newly developed hornets feeling valuable enough to be heard and understood ... temporarily.

## Avoiders Feel Insecure

- **Tortoises** have a goal to feel *safe*.
  - Children who grow up in homes where anger is unrestrained and conflict goes unresolved and where little positive occurs typically become driven by the need for peace.
  - Children who don't feel "safe" typically make being safe their life goal, seeking to protect themselves from "danger." By turning inward and emotionally walling themselves off from others, these newly developed tortoises feel a sense of safety ... temporarily.
- **Chameleons** have a goal to feel *accepted*.
  - Children who grow up with criticism and negative feedback from significant adults in their lives and who don't receive compliments and praise typically become driven by the need for acceptance.
  - Children starved for acceptance can become classic people-pleasers. They do whatever they think is necessary in order to make and keep everyone happy so as not to be criticized or rejected, leaving them—these newly developed *chameleons*—feeling accepted ... temporarily.
- **Weasels** have a goal to feel *confident*.
  - Children who grow up with an overprotective, controlling parent—and who have no firm boundaries or personal accountability for their actions—typically become driven by the need for confidence.
  - Children who lack courage to take a stand find that becoming shrewd and evasive rather than honest and forthright keeps them "out of trouble." This leaves these newly developed *weasels* with a sense of *confidence* and *courage* ... temporarily.

*"My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."  
(Philippians 4:19)*

## C. What Causes the Worst Conflict?

Conflict with people is one matter—but conflict with God is another. Why is conflict with God the *worst* conflict? Can you imagine the small parts of a watch refusing to operate as the watchmaker designed them to operate? What if the hands of a watch moved in the opposite direction? The watch would be useless. You're not useless, but you're a lot like that watch. When God created you, He

had a plan for you. But when you refuse to yield your will to Him, you miss His plan and purpose for your life. This means you are in conflict with Him—the very One who loves you and created you. God wants a relationship with you. Then He will fulfill the very purpose for which you were created. The Lord says,

*“I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”  
(Jeremiah 29:11)*

## **How to Resolve Your Conflict with God**

There are **four** spiritual truths you need to know.

### **#1 Your Problem— You (like everyone else) have chosen to sin.**

We *all* have *chosen* wrong, we all have sinned—not one of us is perfect. Each time we choose to go our own way, not God’s way, we are in conflict with Him. The Bible says that we “sin.”

*“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.” (Isaiah 53:6)*

### **#2 Your Position— Your sin separates you from God.**

Because God is without sin (God’s character is perfect), our sin puts us in conflict with God. This spiritual conflict results in a *penalty* or a *consequence*. The Bible says that the consequence of our sin is to be separated from God’s presence. This separation is called *spiritual death*.

*“Your iniquities have separated you from your God.... The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23)*

### **#3 Your Provision— God provided the way for you to be relieved from the consequence of spiritual death.**

Sin is serious because it separates us from God. Because God is just, He cannot ignore our wrongdoing. But because of His love, He doesn’t want us separated from Him. This creates a dilemma. He has to punish sin, yet He does not want us to die and be permanently separated from Him. This is why the heavenly Father sent His own Son, Jesus, to come to earth for the purpose of dying on the cross for our sins—Jesus actually *chose* to pay the penalty for our sins. We should have died, but instead, Christ died for us.

*“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)*

### **#4 Your Part— You can move from spiritual death to spiritual life now, and experience His peace.**

We must seek God's forgiveness God's way. You need to trust that Jesus Christ died as your substitute and ask Him to come into your life to take control of your life. This is God's only acceptable plan. Jesus said,

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)*

By believing in (relying on) Jesus alone to pay the penalty for your sins and yielding your will to His will, you are truly forgiven of your sins. And when you are forgiven, you are not only cleansed from all of your sin (past, present, and future), but you also have peace with God—saved from staying in conflict with God. The Bible says,

*"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." (John 3:16–17)*

If you desire to have peace with God—so that you will not be in conflict with Him any longer, you can tell Him in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

### **My Prayer for Peace with God**

*"Lord Jesus, I need You. I admit that I have sinned. I understand that the punishment for my sin is death, to be spiritually separated from You. Yet, because of Your love, Your plan is to save me. I believe that what You said in Your Word is true—that You sent Jesus Christ to pay the penalty that I should have to pay. Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross for my sins and taking the punishment in my place. Right now I ask You to come into my life to be my Lord and Savior. Take control of my life and make me the person You created me to be. Thank You for Your unconditional love. And thank You for Your peace. In Your holy name. Amen."*

If you sincerely prayed this prayer, listen to what God says!

*"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."  
(Philippians 4:7)*

## **D. Root Cause of Negative Conflict**

Conflict came hurling at Paul that day, *one stone at a time*.

His Jewish brethren, proponents of legalism and opponents of the gospel of grace, spurred a crowd to throw stones at Paul—a crowd that only moments before had sought to offer sacrifices to him as to a god for his healing of a crippled man. After the stoning, Paul was dragged out of their city and left for dead. However, when his disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the city of Lystra and on to Derbe with Barnabas the next day.

As they traveled, Paul and Barnabas, recognizing that opposition and conflict are inevitable, encouraged the followers of Jesus they encountered, *“encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said”* (Acts 14:22).

The reason we all experience conflict is rooted in a system of wrong beliefs. We assume that what we want is what we need and that it is up to us to defeat those who oppose us. After all, if we don’t protect our interests, who will? This fear-based thinking causes us to selfishly respond by either attacking or avoiding people or situations we perceive to be threatening.

**Wrong Belief:**

“I am afraid of conflict because it reflects negatively on me. To feel secure and significant, I must get rid of conflict by either conquering it, compromising it, or avoiding it.”

**Right Belief:**

“I know that conflict is a natural result of living with different types of people. My sense of security and significance is based on my identity in Christ and in His perfect love and acceptance of me.”

*“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18)*

Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Conflict Resolution: Solving Your People Problems* (pp. 15–19). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.