

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	9
Preface	11
Introduction	13
<b>Part One: Prerequisites for Conflict Resolution</b>	
1. Prerequisite One: Humility	19
2. Prerequisite Two: Gentleness	35
3. Prerequisite Three: Patience	61
4. Prerequisite Four: Loving Forbearance	87
<b>Part Two: Biblical Principles of Conflict Resolution</b>	
5. Three Types of Conflict	115
6. Love Communicates	143
7. Responding to Reproof	169
8. Getting to the Heart of Conflict	189
9. Unbiblical Responses to Conflict: Internal	209
10. Unbiblical Responses to Conflict: External	227
11. Conflict-Resolving Questions	245

12. You Put the Words Right into My Mouth	259
13. Have We Gone Too Far?	269
14. The Hidden Prerequisite	283
Appendix A: How to Use a Conflict Journal	291
Appendix B: Conflicts with Unbelievers	303
Appendix C: Biblical Alternatives to Commonly Used Terms for Sin	311

## PREREQUISITE ONE: HUMILITY

THE FIRST PREREQUISITE for being a biblical peacemaker is humility.

I . . . implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, *with all humility*. (Eph. 4:1–2)

What is it that most often prevents conflicts from being resolved? What is the opposite of humility? Pride is the *one sin, above all others*, that hinders our ability to resolve conflicts with others. “Pride only breeds quarrels” (Prov. 13:10 NIV). It comes in many show-stopping forms. See if you can recognize any of them in your life.

- Unwillingness to admit when I am wrong
- Resorting to defensiveness, blame shifting, justification, or anger when I’m lawfully reproved by another
- Becoming impatient or upset when contradicted in speech—especially when publicly contradicted
- Oversensitivity to correction
- Being unwilling when wronged to forgive an offender who has not demonstrated extreme submission or repentance
- Difficulty in being pleased by others

Conflicts often occur when one person sins against another.<sup>1</sup> Such conflicts cannot be resolved effectively without confession<sup>2</sup> (and repentance) on the part of the sinning party. And that takes humility. But pride often gets in the way.

## WHAT IS PRIDE?

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome is a disease that renders the body's immune system *unable to resist* invasion by several microorganisms that cause serious infections. According to my encyclopedia,

The AIDS virus causes so much damage to the immune system that the body becomes susceptible to a variety of opportunistic infections— infections that are less harmful to people with normal immune systems but take advantage of the breakdown in an AIDS sufferer's immune system to produce devastating and eventually lethal diseases.<sup>3</sup>

The sin of pride is the AIDS of the soul. Almost like a cataract, the HIV/AIDS virus blinds the eyes of its victim's immune system, preventing it from seeing those bodily enemies that threaten his life.

Pride blinds us not only to itself, but to every other sin tucked away in the recesses of our hearts and lives. It causes us to hate correction and reproof. It hides our sin from us, it justifies our sin, it excuses our sin, and it keeps us from repenting of our sin. It deceives us into thinking that we are spiritually well when, in fact, we have a deadly cancer and are in desperate need of the Great Physician's balm.<sup>4</sup> (Of course, when

1. As we will explore later in this book, sin is not the only cause of conflict. Sometimes conflicts can occur when (non-sinful) differences in people's views, personas, values, lifestyles, or approaches to problems cause them to disagree.

2. The first person to whom we must always confess our sins is God, who promises that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9; cf. Pss. 32:5; 51). This is necessary if we want to be in proper relationship with God and man (see Acts 24:16). We need God's grace—that is, His supernatural enabling power and desire (see Phil. 2:13)—to properly repent of those sins that mess up all of our interactions.

3. *Encarta* (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press, 1993), CD-ROM, s. v. "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome."

4. When people die as a result of contracting AIDS, they do not die of AIDS. They die from other diseases commonly referred to as AIDS-related complications, such as pneumonia or tuberculosis.

it comes time for us to confess our sin, we expect those whom we have offended to overlook our “little mistakes.”)

Look at what Richard Baxter, the prolific Puritan writer, had to say about the pathology of this horrible plague of the soul:

Pride is a deep rooted and a self-preserving sin; and therefore is harder to be killed and rooted up than other sins. It hinders the discovery of itself. . . . It will not allow the sinner to see his pride when he is reprov'd; neither will it allow him to confess it if he see it; nor . . . to loathe himself and forsake it. . . . Even when he recognizes all of the evidences of pride in others, he will not see it in himself. When he feels himself despising reproof, and knows that this is a sign of pride in others, yet he will not know it in himself. If you would go about to cure him of this or any other fault, you shall feel that you are handling a wasp or an adder; yet when he is spitting the venom of pride against the reprov'er, he does not perceive that he is proud; this venom is a part of his nature and therefore is not felt as harmful or poisonous.<sup>5</sup>

The proud person doesn't understand the dynamics of Proverbs 15:33 and 18:12 that “before honor is humility.”

Notice the terms that Solomon uses to describe the persons whose pride will not allow them to accept reproof or instruction.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Prov. 1:7)

Do not reprove a *scoffer*, or he will hate you,  
Reprove a wise man, and he will love you. (Prov. 9:8; cf. Prov. 15:2)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,  
But he who hates reproof is *stupid*. (Prov. 12:1)

5. Richard Baxter, *Baxter's Practical Works*, vol. 1, *A Christian Directory* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 207.

## PREREQUISITES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

He is on the path of life who heeds instruction,  
But he who forsakes reproof goes astray. (Prov. 10:17)

Humility, on the other hand, causes people to realize that because of the effects of sin on the human mind, we don't know everything. Each of us is quite capable of misperceiving, misjudging, misunderstanding, and miscommunicating. More than this, God didn't give any of us the entire loaf of bread (all wisdom). The humble person recognizes and appreciates the fact that God has blessed *others* with gifts, abilities, and information from which we may learn. A humble person realizes that he is a great sinner capable not only of doing wrong, but also of being blinded to the sin about which he is being confronted. The humble person can be grateful for the gift of counsel—for both the correction and the corrector.

If you're not quite sure of the connection between pride and lack of forgiveness, let's look at two brief conversations, first between two proud people and then between two humble people:

Jim: You are so messed up. Who do you think you are talking to me that way? I'm not a child! I deserve to be treated with respect.

Bob: So you don't think the way you're acting right now is childish? Look, I'm having a bad day. You're just going to have to get over it (and while you're at it, you need to get over yourself) and forgive me.

Jim: I'm not quite ready to extend my forgiveness to the likes of you. You haven't offended just any ol' person, you've offended *me!* And I don't go around granting people my forgiveness simply on the basis of their word without them somehow otherwise *propitiating* my anger.

Whoops, rerun. Let's try that again.

Jim: Hey Bob, you know I have a lot of respect for you and the way you conduct yourself in general. But the way you spoke to me yesterday left

me a bit puzzled and frankly disturbed. I might be wrong, but what I heard you say was \_\_\_\_\_. It seemed you were angry at me or something. It came across as rather condescending and even a bit vindictive. But it was bugging me, and so I thought I should check and see if I heard it right.

Bob: Thank you for caring enough to say something. You know, I haven't quite got that off my conscience. God didn't let me sleep well last night, and I'd already decided to talk to you in order to try to make it right. I'm sorry. I probably did have a condescending attitude toward you. I wasn't actually angry at you. Two hours before we spoke one of my subordinates at work embarrassed me very badly in front of my boss, who proceeded to falsely accuse me in front of lots of people. At any rate, will you forgive me for having such a proud and dismissive attitude and for setting a bad example for you and for any others who might have been watching? Is there anything else I need to ask your forgiveness for?

Jim: I forgive you, brother. Thank you for hearing me and, more importantly, for listening to what the Lord was convicting you of.

A humble believer recognizes the enormity of his own debt of sin that Christ has forgiven and considers any offenses that he must forgive as minutia in comparison (see Matt. 18:21–35). He willingly grants forgiveness to those who sincerely ask for it. In the absence of hard evidence to the contrary, he takes the repentant brother at his word.

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, *saying*, "I repent," forgive him. (Luke 17:3–4)

Humble people have realistic expectations of themselves and are willing to give others grace. Because they understand the importance of respect and honor, they grant them to others. If someone's action

can be taken two different ways, they choose to see it through the eyes of love and grace. Baxter again says it well.

As godly, humble men rightly amplify their sins in light of the greatness and excellency of God whom they offend; so the proud man foolishly amplifies every little wrong that is done to him, and every word that is said against him, and every supposed omission or neglect of him, because of the high estimation he has of himself.<sup>6</sup>

In what ways may our desire to be too highly esteemed by others affect our ability to resolve conflicts successfully? Here are just a few possibilities. (As you view this list, remember that we may still manifest pride in conflict even if the person with whom we are speaking is not one by whom we want to be esteemed. Of course, we might think ourselves better than that person and therefore consider his opinion irrelevant, which is still pride.)

- It may tempt us to respond defensively (to shift the blame to someone or something else, to justify our sin, or to become angry) when reproved.
- It may tempt us to exaggerate (lie about) our virtues and minimize our flaws.
- It may produce in us a censorious, critical, condemning, accusing, judgmental attitude toward others (especially toward those in positions of authority). Others—especially those who know us best—may be repulsed by our pride and consequently try to humble us by putting us in our place.
- It may tempt us to include in our discussion superfluous tidbits of information about our own accomplishments that have little or nothing to do with the issue at hand. In addition to distracting from the resolution (wasting time), our pride may again tempt others to a sinful response.
- It may tempt us to outwardly agree with others even though we don't inwardly agree.

6. Baxter, *Baxter's Practical Works*, 203.



“Everything Lou writes is helpful, practical, and biblical because of his wisdom gained through years of counseling experience and his love for God’s Word.”

—JIM NEWHEISER

Executive Director, Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship

Many Christians see *conflict* as a dirty word—something to be avoided at all costs. After all, aren’t Christians to be peacemakers who strive to maintain unity?

But, as Lou Priolo reminds us, many other things that the Bible exhorts us to do—such as convicting, rebuking, and admonishing other Christians—make conflict a necessary part of the Christian life.

Lou takes us through the biblical principles of conflict resolution, beginning before conflict even starts. He shows us the prerequisites we must have in place as we go into conflict, what is at the heart of our conflict, what makes it biblical or unbiblical, and how we should respond to it. He also shares practical steps and advice, giving us specific talking points to resolve conflict and journaling exercises that help us to grow when it happens.

Learn how to “make every effort” to maintain unity—even when that effort must start with conflict!

“Conflicts are like forest fires. If you can put them out while they’re still small, you can save an enormous amount of time and effort. That’s why this book is so valuable: it provides simple, biblically sound, and incredibly effective insights for resolving conflict in its earliest stages, when it still involves only two people. If you learn and practice these principles, you will spend more time enjoying the people around you—rather than fighting prolonged relational fires.”

—KEN SANDE, President, Relational Wisdom 360; Author, *The Peacemaker*

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