

# THE BIBLICAL FAMILY

## WEEK 5: HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT BIBLICALLY IN THE FAMILY?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss the Biblical family. This is going to be an overview of what the Bible says about some key topics, roles and patterns that should be in every family.
- Week 1: What is a Biblical family?
- Week 2: What priorities do parents, husbands & wives, have in their family?
- Week 3: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part I
- Week 4: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part II
- **Week 5: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part I**
- Week 6: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part II
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on the purpose of the family and how God desires to use the family for His glory and for our good.

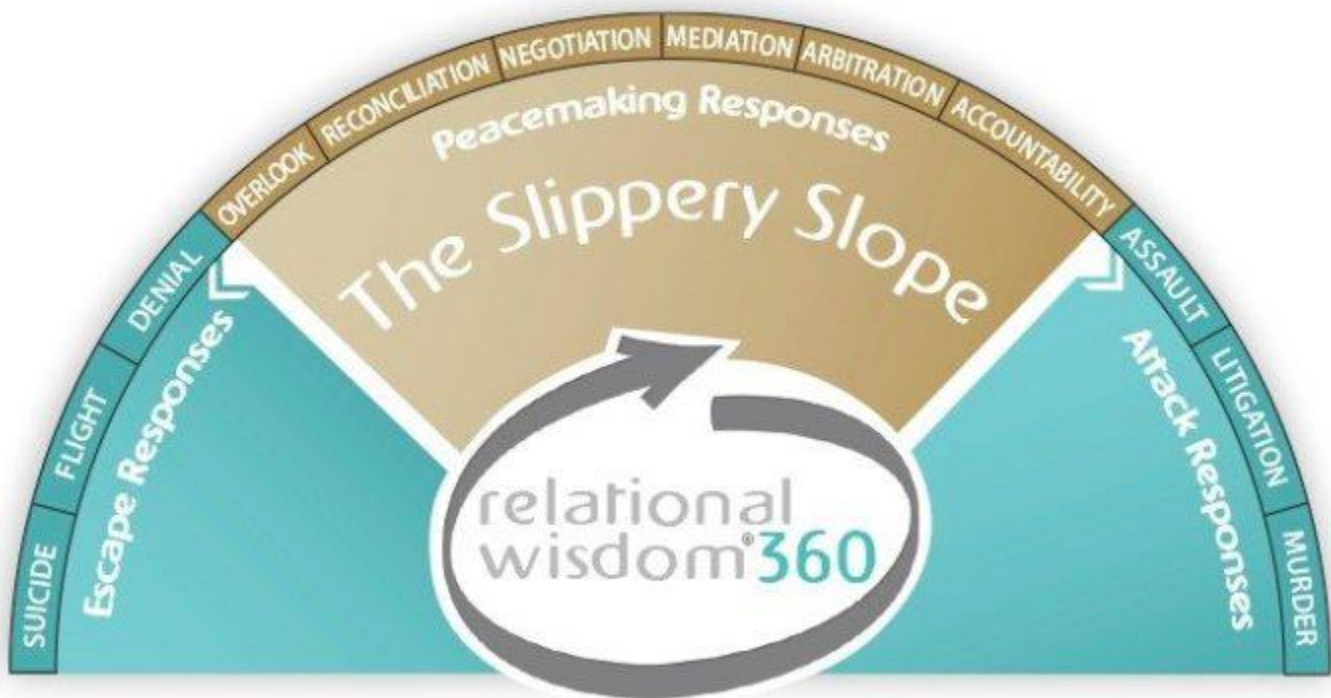
### INTRODUCTION

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- Over the past 4 weeks we have been discussing what the family is, both in the world and from a Biblical worldview. We have also defined what roles should be in the family, both from the world's perspective and from what the Bible tells us God desires.
- Over the next two weeks, we are going to be handling the topic of conflict resolution within the family.
- All families have conflict, some more and some less.
- When you put kids or other people into the mix, there are going to be an abundance of opinions and desires, and no shortage of people not getting their own way.
- It is important to remember that when we talk about conflict resolution, it really is a "one size fits all" approach. Whether you have conflict in your marriage, your family, your job, your friends, the resolution process is going to be the same, it may just be applied differently.
- Whether you have small kids that you are training in this or older kids that you have conflict with, the principles are going to be the same but how they are used will differ.

# HOW PEOPLE DEAL WITH CONFLICT<sup>1</sup>

- When dealing with conflict, there are three main responses: **escape**, **attack** or **make peace**.
- As you can see from the chart below, there are actions which go along with each response.



## Escape Responses (peace-faking)

- People tend to use escape responses when they are more interested in avoiding unpleasant people or situations than in resolving differences.
- **Denial**—One way is to pretend that a problem does not exist or refuse to do what's needed to resolve a conflict properly. These responses bring temporary relief and make matters worse (1 Sam. 2:22-25).
- **Flight**—Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away. This may take the form of pulling away from a relationship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing churches. Flight may be legitimate in extreme circumstances (1 Sam. 19:9-10), but in most cases it only postpones a proper solution to a problem.
- **Suicide**—When people lose all hope of resolving a conflict, they may seek to escape from the situation by attempting to take their own lives (1 Sam 31:4).

## Attack Responses (peace-breaking)

- People tend to use attack responses when they are more interested in controlling others and getting their way than in preserving a relationship.

<sup>1</sup> Ken Sande *Peace Making for Families* p. 5

- **Assault**—Some people try to overcome an opponent by using various forms of force or intimidation, such as verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence, or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally (see Acts 6:8-15). Such conduct always makes conflict worse.
- **Litigation**—Although some conflicts may legitimately be taken before a civil judge (see Acts 24:1-26:32; Rom. 13:1-5), lawsuits usually damage relationships, diminish our Christian witness, and often fail to achieve complete justice. This is why Christians are commanded to make every effort to settle their differences within the church rather than the civil courts (see Matt. 5:25-26; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).
- **Murder**—In extreme cases, people may be so desperate to win a dispute that they will try to kill those who oppose them (see Acts 7:54-58). While most people would not kill someone, we still stand guilty of murder in God’s eyes when we harbor anger or contempt in our hearts toward others (1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21).

## Peacemaking Responses

- **Peacemakers are people who breathe grace.** Inspired by the gospel, they draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then breathe out his love, mercy, forgiveness, and wisdom to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and model repentance and reconciliation.
- The six responses found on the top portion of the slippery slope may be divided into two categories: **personal peacemaking responses** and **assisted peacemaking responses**:

## Personal Peacemaking

- There are 3 biblical ways to resolve conflicts personally and privately, just between you and the other party.
- **Overlook an Offense**—Many disputes are so insignificant that they should be resolved by quietly overlooking an offense. “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov. 19:11). Overlooking an offense is a form of forgiveness, and involves a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger.
- **Reconciliation**—If an offense is too serious to overlook or has damaged our relationship, we need to resolve personal or relational issues through confession, loving correction, and forgiveness. “[If] your brother has something against you ... be reconciled” (Matt. 5:23-24). “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1; see Matt. 18:15). “As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” (Col. 3:13).
- **Negotiation**—Even if we successfully resolve relational issues, we may still need to work through material issues related to money, property, or other rights. This should be done through a cooperative bargaining process in which you and the other person seek to reach a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each side. “Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4)

## Assisted Peacemaking

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- When a dispute cannot be resolved personally, God calls us to seek assistance from other believers.
- **Mediation**—If two people cannot reach an agreement in private, they should ask one or more objective outside people to meet with them to help them communicate more effectively and explore possible solutions. “If he does not listen [to you], take one or two others along with you” (Matt. 18:16). These mediators may ask questions and give advice, but the parties retain the responsibility of making the final decision on how to resolve their differences.
- **Arbitration**—When you and an opponent cannot come to a voluntary agreement on a material issue, you may appoint arbitrators to listen to your arguments and render a binding decision to settle the issue. “If you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?” (1 Cor. 6:4).
- **Accountability**—If a person who professes to be a Christian wanders from the Lord by refusing to be reconciled and do what is right, Jesus commands church leaders to lovingly intervene to hold him or her accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness: “If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not ... go in search of the one who went astray? ... If he refuses to listen ..., tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:12,17).
- As you can see, the escape responses only postpone a proper solution to a problem, and attack responses usually damage relationships and make conflicts worse.
- Therefore, you should generally try first to deal with conflict personally and privately by using one of the first three conciliation responses (overlooking, discussion, or negotiation).
- To learn how to carry out these steps in a biblically faithful manner, see The Four G’s.

## What’s next?

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- Continuing on in this class and finishing next week, we are going to discuss why we have conflict, how conflict begins, how we can cure ourselves from conflict and how we can prepare our own hearts for conflict resolution. We will lastly look at the 4 G’s, a Biblical framework for conflict resolution.

## WHY DO WE HAVE CONFLICT?

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- James 4:1-3 “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”
- This passage describes the root cause of conflict in each person...conflict comes when we have unmet desires which originate in our hearts.

- While conflict always involve more than just you, conflict comes when we have set an expectation in our own heart and that expectation is not met.
- **A common question:** what about when I have done nothing wrong and conflict comes upon me?
  - Many people believe that they have a “right” to respond to someone when they have not been talked to with “respect.”
  - This idea is still an unmet expectation in one’s heart. You “expect” to be talked to in a certain way and when that does not happen, you respond sinfully in anger or shouting.
  - While how the other person has talked to you or treated you may not be kind at all, you may still have expectations in your heart, which when not met, are exposed through your sinful response.
- Speaking on James 4:1-3 “At the very bottom, after all else has been scraped off, James sees the desire for pleasure as the cause (vv. 1, 2). These desires for pleasure, literally translated, are “soldiering” or “campaigning” in one’s bodily members. That is, they are in full muster and are prepared to fight to obtain the pleasures your counselee desires. **The warfare, then, begins within.**”<sup>2</sup>
- The war over our heart is *always* taking place. There is never a time that you are not in the battle for how you are going to act, react and respond as a Christian.
- **“So to sum up, outer quarrels among Christians come from losing battles within.** Once again James takes an inside view of man. James does this, as before when dealing with temptation, **to expose the dynamic at work so that you will know where to aim your efforts to rectify the situation.** **It is within that the first and foremost change must begin.** One must realize his sin, confess it and seek God’s forgiveness (and the forgiveness of those he has offended) and then, after reconciliation, begin to put on the new, biblical, righteous ways outlined in the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup>
- We have conflict on the outside because we are allowing sin to dominate on the inside. Every conflict that you have had, either good or bad, can be traced back to some expectation which has not been met.
- Even in a positive setting, when someone does not meet the expectations at work, they must be confronted, told they are not doing what is expected, be told again what is expected and then either trained on how to do their job or possibly let go.
- When someone sins, we are told in **Galatians 6:1** “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one** in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too **will not be tempted.**”

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<sup>2</sup> Jay E. Adams, Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude, The Christian Counselor’s Commentary (Cordova, TN: The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 200.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 201

- That is a command from Paul, *you go and restore the sinning brother!* That means that Paul is commanding Christians to go into conflict.
- Conflict is not to be avoided but to be done in a Biblical and loving manner.
- So, we have conflict because of our own expectations not being met or because someone else has not met the expectations which were set out for them and we need to correct them.

## MONITORING OUR OWN HEARTS<sup>4</sup>

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- Sande lays out four ways that we can see the progression of idols or expectations in our own heart.

### I Desire

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- Conflict always begins with a desire. It is important to note that not all desires are evil. Obviously if we desire vengeance or greed, that would be sinful.
- But there is nothing wrong with desiring a clean home, a spouse, a new car, etc.
- Some of these “good desires” will come and some will pass. There will be some things that you are able to obtain and others which may allude you your whole life.
- The question that we need to ask is, *what if we never get what we desire?* What if, the good desire never comes to fruition?
- Do you trust that the Lord will not withhold anything good from you?
- **Psalm 84:11-12 “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!”** Is this the heart attitude that you have when your desires go unmet?
- As Sande says “On the other hand, you can dwell on your disappointment and allow it to control your life. At the very least, this will result in self-pity and bitterness toward [the reason you think you can’t have what you want]. At worst, it can destroy your [relationship] with anyone who has gotten in your way.”

### I Demand

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- The downward spiral begins after your expectations are not met and you begin to dwell on the notion that you are not getting what you deserve.
- This unmet desire or expectation begins to dig down deeper into the heart. The more that we think we need or deserve something, the deeper this thing digs down.
- **The more that something is wanted, the more we think we need and deserve it.**

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Sande *Peace Making for Families* pp. 17-22.

- When we believe the thing we desire is essential to our fulfillment and well-being, it has just moved from a desire to a demand.
- **Speaking in Biblical terms, this thing has just become an idol.**
- In Biblical terms, anything that we set our heart on, anything that we depend on or desire more than God has taken its place as our idol.
- Idols are not just from sin but they can (and often in Christian's lives) arise from good desires. Often the problem is not what we want, but the fact that we want too much, or something does not come soon enough.
  - For example, it is not too much to want a nice quiet evening at home, but to want that all time at the expense of everyone and everything else, it then becomes your ruling desire.
  - If you have a desire to see your children love and obey God, both for His glory and their good, this is a good desire. But for it to be a Godly desire, your response to your children's disobedience should be Godly discipline.
  - If your true heart's desire is comfort and quiet, though you say it's for God's glory, when the child sins your reaction will be quite different than a loving and caring parent.

## I Judge

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- After the desire has taken root as an idol in the heart, the next step is judgment.
- When people fail to satisfy our desires and live up to our expectations, we are quick to criticize and condemn them...both in our hearts and with our words.
- **This is where we should start to come to our senses.** We have now doubled our idols...we have one ruling in our hearts, dictating our actions...and we have now set ourselves up as the ultimate judge. "This is a formula for excruciating conflict."
- **Sinful judging is characterized best when we speculate on what others' motives are against us.**
- The reason this is so heinous is because it reveals a real lack of love and concern towards people.
- This type of judgment seems to happen the most among the people who are the closest to you. In a family setting, because of the closeness of your relationships, it is very easy to have expectations which become conditions and standards that we ultimately use to judge one another.

## I Punish

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- **"Idols always demand sacrifice.** When others fail to satisfy our demands and expectations, our idols demand that they should suffer." We do this either deliberately, looking for ways to make people pay, or we do it subconsciously, by no longer thinking well about this person.

- This punishment can be anger, lashing out in a rage, using our words to try and bring hurt to someone. It is only when someone gives into our desire that we will stop coming against them.
- **We punish those who do not bow down to our idols.**
- “As we grow in faith and awareness of our sin, most of us recognize and reject overt and obviously sinful means of punishing others. But, our idols do not give up their influence easily, and they often lead us to develop more subtle means of punishing those who do not serve them.”
- We do things like withdrawing from relationships so that the other person will feel the loss.
- We may withhold communication or affection or walk around gloomy around them.
- This is the surest way of knowing you have an idol actively ruling in your heart.

## **HOW DO WE CURE IDOLS IN OUR HEART TO MAKE PEACE?**

- An idol is something that we love, fear and/or trust. It is something that we think we must have in order to be truly happy or fulfilled.
- As Sande says, “**Love, fear, trust – these are words of worship!** Jesus commands us to love God, fear God, and trust God alone (Matthew 22:37; Luke 12:4-5, John 14:1). Any time we long for something apart from God, fear something more than God, or trust in something other than God to make us happy, fulfilled, or secure, we are engaging in the worship of false gods. As a result, we deserve the judgment and wrath of the true God.”<sup>5</sup>
- God has provided the cure for our idolatry problem by sending Christ to die on the cross and take the punishment which we deserved.
- When there are idols in your heart, they must be repented of, and our worship must be put back on God.
- “**Sin is what you do when you are not fully satisfied in God.**” In other words, we have idols because we are not fully satisfied with what God has provided for us. If we are not fully satisfied in Him, we will be forever looking for other sources of satisfaction and security.

Next week, we are going to dive into the practical ways that we can resolve conflict in our families. We are going to look at 4 key steps that the Bible lays out so that we can have victory in conflict and peace in the house.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Sande *Peace Making for Families* pp. 25