

“How to Reduce Conflicts with Others”

Text: Philippians 2:1-2

January 20, 2008

Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

Rev. Chris Geline

PRAY!

One of the major causes of unhappiness in our world is strained relationships. Conflict is a kill-joy. How do you handle conflict in your life? I hear over and over again from people how much they dislike conflict.

- Grady & Ray

Unity is a key ingredient for success and fulfillment in life.

- To have a successful business the employees must work together.
- To have a successful football team the players must work together.
- To have successful government the congress and the president must cooperate.
- To have a successful family the members must work together.
- To have a successful church we must work together.

Very little is accomplished in life by yourself. Success is never a one-person show. Very little is accomplished without cooperation. When there is unity there is tremendous power and potential. The problem is people don't always get along. How do you reduce conflict and increase cooperation?

In Philippians 2, Paul talks about how to have unity and how he deals with conflict.

Philippians 2:1-2, *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”*

He gives us four expressions of unity here.

- “Be like minded”
- “Have the same love”
- “Be one in the spirit”
- “Be one in purpose”

Paul says that his joy is made complete when a church is united. Then he outlines five practical steps to reduce conflict with others in order to preserve the unity.

I. DEFUSE COMPETITION

- A. Too often we compete with people on our own team. Instead of complementing each other they are competing with each other. They are fighting each other. They have conflicting desires.
- B. Philippians 2:3, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition...”* The Jerusalem Bible says, *“There must be no competition among you”*
- C. Defuse means to reduce the tension, strain and anger.
 - 1. V. 3 in the Philips version says, *“Never act from motives of rivalry.”* As a kid you were involved in sibling rivalries, competed with your brothers and sisters. Now you’re much older and much more sophisticated. But some of you are still competing with your brothers and sisters, trying to prove that you’re better. You’re an adult and you’re still trying to compete! You’re on the same team, the same family.
- D. James 4:1-2, *“What causes quarrels? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but you don’t get it.”*
 - 1. He’s saying that the first cause of conflict is competing desires. Our society teaches us instant gratification. When my needs conflict with your needs, we have trouble. We live in a very competitive world. If you want to have unity you’ve got to diffuse competition.

II. DELETE CONCEIT

- A. Get rid of the pride issue. Don’t do things just to show off your ego, just to gain praise or glory from others.
- B. Vs. 3, *“Do nothing out of vain conceit...”* (*“Never act from motives of personal vanity”* – Philips; *“Don’t do anything from a cheap desire to boast”* – Good News).
 - 1. An egotist is an “I” specialist. Their I’s are too close together. All they can see is themselves. The Bible says, *“Pride goes before destruction”*. The person who gets too big for his britches will eventually be exposed in the end.
- C. Proverbs 13:10, *“Pride only breeds quarrels.”*
- D. The first cause of conflict is competing desires. The second cause of conflict is personal pride – when I’ve got an ego and refuse to admit it when I’m wrong. That just breeds quarrels. If you could eliminate ego you would solve most of the people problems in today’s world.

III. DECREASE CRITICISM

- A. V. 3 also says, *“In humility consider others better than yourselves.”* When he says “better” he doesn’t mean “superior”. He means “worthy of respect.” He says you’re not to put people down; you treat them better than yourself.

1. This is a radical concept. Treat others better than yourself? Humility, consider them better? That's the exact opposite of our culture in America. We are full of people who think they are better than everybody else. We have elevated selfishness to an art form, a character quality.
 2. He says decrease criticism because when you're critical you're thinking that you're better than the other people.
- B. Humility – not thinking less of yourself, but rather not thinking of yourself at all. Your focus is other people. You're others-centered rather than self-centered. The people who think they are humble, aren't. The humble person doesn't even know it because he or she is focusing on everybody else.
- C. If you want to get rid of conflict in your life, decrease criticism.
1. Small town life, E. Bay
- D. The third cause of conflict is when I fail to value other people; when I treat them with less respect than they deserve.

IV. DEMONSTRATE CONSIDERATION

- A. V. 4, *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."* Don't just be interested in your own affairs. The Greek word for "look" in this verse is "scopos" from which we get the word "scope" – like the scope on a rifle. Telescope in on it. Pay attention to the needs of other people. But we don't do it and that's why we have problems in our marriage, with our kids, with people whom we work with. We don't pay attention to their needs. Look and listen is how you pay consideration.
1. Could you name the five greatest interests of your wife? Husband? Kids? Because you know them and have paid attention and you know what's interesting to them. Demonstrate consideration.
- B. 1 Peter 3:7, *"Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wife so that nothing will hinder your prayers."* Spouses, how you treat each other affects your prayer life.
- C. The fourth cause of conflict is when I'm insensitive to others' needs. When I only see my needs, my feelings, how tired I feel, how pressured I feel, what I'd like to do on my day off.

V. DEVELOP CHRIST-LIKENESS

- A. V. 5, *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ."* Jesus was a master at relationships. He is our model and great example. If you want to know how to get along with people, even those who are hard to get along with, look at Jesus. Get the same attitude that He had.

B. What was His attitude?

1. v. 6, *“Who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”* He didn’t demand rights but He willingly gave them up. The person who yields his or her rights to God, gets God as defender of those rights. Who do you want defending you, yourself or God?
2. v. 7, *“But made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a Servant, being made in human likeness.”* He has a serving attitude. How do you know if you have a serving attitude? How do you respond when people treat you like a servant?
3. v. 8, *“And being found in appearance as a man He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross.”* He was willing to sacrifice for the benefit of others.

C. It’s impossible to live a lifestyle of total unselfishness on your own.

It is human nature. I can’t live totally unselfishly with my wife or my kids or the people I work with. I can’t do it by myself.

- D. The fifth cause of conflict is living without Christ. Unity is a gift of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:3, *“Do your best to preserve the unity, which the Spirit gives, by the peace that binds you together.”* The Spirit puts unity in our lives and families. In order for you to get along with other people you must grow more and more like Jesus.

The good news is that it is possible to live a happy, satisfying life with other relationships. It is possible.

- It is possible to live in harmony with those you choose to live in harmony with.
- It is possible to have a meaningful relationship with that person you married.
- And it is possible to enjoy the people around you.
- How? The solution is letting Jesus Christ live through you. When Jesus Christ is in me and Jesus Christ is in you, Christ is not going to fight with Christ. Where there is disunity there is sin. Somebody isn’t living like Jesus.

PRAYER