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Sermon Notes

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## **Proverbs on Conflict Resolution**

We live in a world torn apart by strife and conflict at every possible level:

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the first evil they experienced was their lack of intimacy with each other... previously,

*Genesis 2:25 The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame*

That status went far beyond the issue of clothing... it had to do with honesty, integrity, trust, love, relational harmony... all those things were lost when they sinned:

*Genesis 3:7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Soon, the relational discord spread from husband and wife to brother and brother. Cain and Abel both made offerings to God, but the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor... so Cain became very angry – both with God and with Abel. Soon, that anger flowed out into murder:

*Genesis 4:8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.*

This began a long road of conflict from human to human. It led to overwhelming violence in the days before Noah's flood:

*Genesis 6:11-12 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.*

And that road continues even to this day. We see conflict from nation to nation. WWI was supposed to be the "War to end all wars" ... but a little more than twenty

years after the Treaty of Versailles was signed, Europe was marching into an even more deadly conflict... WWII. When that war ended in two horrifying atomic blasts that incinerated two Japanese cities, and when the aftermath of the war revealed that six million Jews had been slaughtered by the Nazis, and

Wikipedia lists 168 wars and armed conflicts that have plagued the world since the end of WWII...

The most deadly of these has been the ongoing Kivu conflict in the Congo, which has gone on from May of 2004 until this year claiming a staggering 5.4 million lives!

But human conflict goes beyond the global kind... it disrupts workplaces, with strife between bosses and employees, and between co-workers themselves; it disrupts neighborhoods, with neighbors taking each other to court to solve interpersonal issues arising from sin; it pollutes governments, where political parties use slander and dirty tricks to destroy political enemies; and it extends to the place where it all began at the human level: MARRIAGE... where divorce continues to claim between 40-50% of all marriages.

The ROOT issue is SIN... and our broken relationship with God

*Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. <sup>21</sup> "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the ONLY ANSWER... only if we are RIGHT with God can we possibly end conflict between human beings:

*Romans 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

This RECONCILIATION with God makes it possible for sinners to be reconciled to each other through the shed blood of Jesus Christ:

*Ephesians 2:15-17 His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.*

So we Christians can truly be AT PEACE with one another!! But that doesn't mean that we need no help in the area of CONFLICT RESOLUTION... not at all!! We need all the help we can get!!

Proverbs stands in to give us amazing insight into the origin, nature, and resolution of conflicts between sinners

## I. God's Attitude Toward Dissension

***6:16-19 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: ... a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.***

- HATE is a strong word... but it is an ACCURATE reflection of God's heart attitude toward strife, conflict and dissension
- The unity God intends between people is pictured by the perfect unity that exists in the Trinity
- There is never a shadow or shade of conflict, never a disagreement, never a dissenting vote or minority report... there's not a single issue on which there is the slightest variation of opinion from Father to Son to Holy Spirit
- Still less is there any kind of jealousy, arguing, fighting, or warfare
- So God HATES the conflicts that so obviously characterize human relationships
- The full effect of the gospel is to bring sinners into a perfect relationship not only with Himself but with a countless multitude from every nation on earth

## II. The Devastation of Human Conflicts

***17:1 Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.***

***21:9 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.***

- It would be better to undergo the most extreme privations than to live in a house of strife... better to eat the moldiest piece of bread than to sit at a lavish feast when there is strife
- So also marriage is ruined by a husband or wife who is quarrelsome... it would be better to roll out your sleeping bag in the attic than to live with such a spouse... strife and conflict ruin marriages
- The biggest problem with human conflict is how difficult it is to recover from:

**18:19** *An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.*

These verses and many others speak of how dangerous human strife is

### III. What Causes Fights and Quarrels Among You

#### A. Pride

**13:10** *Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.*

#### B. Instant Annoyance

**12:16** *A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*

#### C. Anger

**15:18** *A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.*

**29:11** *A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

**29:22** *An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.*

#### D. Words

**18:21** *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

##### 1. Many words

**10:19** *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

##### 2. Reckless words

**12:18** *Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

##### 3. Harsh words

**15:1** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

##### 4. Deceitful words

**15:4** *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

**25:23** *As a north wind brings rain, so a sly tongue brings angry looks.*

##### 5. Gossip

**16:28** *A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.*

##### 6. Insults

**11:12** *A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue.*

#### E. Hatred (Doesn't Overlook Offense)

**10:12** *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*

#### F. People Who Love a Quarrel

**17:19** *He who loves a quarrel loves sin; he who builds a high gate invites destruction.*

**20:3** *It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*

**26:21** *As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.*

**27:15-16** *A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; <sup>16</sup> restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand. [see also 19:13, 21:9, 21:19, 25:24]*

G. Unforgiveness

**17:9** *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

H. Misunderstanding (poor listening!!)

**18:13** *He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.*

I. Alcohol (or drugs)

**23:29-35** *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? <sup>30</sup> Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.*

J. Adultery

**6:32-35** *for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. <sup>35</sup> He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.*

K. Provocation from Fools

**27:3** *Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.*

L. Greed

**28:25** *A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.*

The Book of Proverbs gives an amazingly thorough list of the root causes of conflict

Pride, instant annoyance, anger, words, hatred, people who love a quarrel, unforgiveness, misunderstandings, alcohol, adultery, provocation, greed...

These types of sins are at the root of every human conflict in history – both between a husband and wife, brother to brother, neighbor to neighbor, nation to nation

### III. How to Avoid Conflicts

Since conflicts are so incredibly costly, so deadly dangerous, how can we best avoid them according to the Book of Proverbs?

Certainly the gospel gives us the power to recover from conflicts, to heal and forgive and move on; to restore broken relationships...

But isn't it better to AVOID the damage caused by conflict?

Benjamin Franklin said “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”... sure enough, Proverbs speaks of how to live a life more free of conflicts because of the wisdom in your heart

A. Be Patient & Even-tempered (have a long fuse)

**14:29** *A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.*

**16:32** *Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.*

**17:27** *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.*

**29:11** *A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

B. Overlook an Insult

**12:16** *A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*

**19:11** *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.*

**20:3** *It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.*

C. Be an Active Peacemaker

**15:18** *A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.*

D. Use Gentle, Healing Words

**15:1** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

**15:4** *The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.*

**17:27** *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.*

E. Forgive Quickly and Wholeheartedly (as the Lord forgave you!!)

**10:12** *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*

**17:9** *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

F. Drop the Matter Quickly (before it gets out of control!!)

**17:14** *Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.*

G. Don't Hang Around People Who Love to Argue

**22:10** *Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.*

**22:24-25** *Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, <sup>25</sup> or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.*

H. Observe Proper Social Boundaries

**25:17** *Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—too much of you, and he will hate you.*

I. Don't Meddle in Other's Private Affairs

**26:17** *Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own.*

## IV. How to Resolve Conflicts

### A. LISTEN!!

**18:2** *A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.*

### B. Get All the Facts

**18:18** *The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.*

### C. Use Gentle, Healing Words... also PERSUADE!!

**15:1** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

**25:15** *Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.*

### D. Make Amends for Sin [ask for forgiveness]

**14:9** *Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.*

### E. Forgive Quickly and Wholeheartedly (as the Lord forgave you!!)

**10:12** *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*

**17:9** *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

### F. Don't Feed the Issue... Let It Die!

**26:20** *Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*

**26:21** *As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.*

### G. Leave Retribution to God

**20:22** *Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.*

### H. Show Kindness, Even to the Worst Enemy (commit the rest to God)

**25:21-22** *If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. <sup>22</sup> In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.*

### I. Give a Gift

**21:14** *A gift given in secret soothes anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath.*

### J. Drive Out Mocker and Those Who Love Quarrels

**22:10** *Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.*

### K. Casting Lots (when all else fails, flip a coin!!)

**18:18** *Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart.*

## V. Wisdom from “The Peacemaker”

### A. Ken Sande’s Book Remarkably Helpful

1. Conflict can be a path to growth in Christ
2. It is not surprising when two individuals have different views
3. Those views can actually AID BOTH people to grow in a deeper understanding of God’s best

***Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.***

It’s hard to imagine how iron can sharpen iron without some heat and some sparks... but that doesn’t make sinful conflict alright

According to Ken Sande, conflict, handled properly, provides opportunities

### B. Sande’s Three Types of Responses

1. Escape Responses: “Peace-faking”  
suicide... flight... denial
2. Attack Responses: “Peace-breaking”  
Assault... litigation... murder
3. Peacemaking Responses  
Overlook... reconciliation... negotiation... arbitration... accountability

### C. The Four G’s:

1. Glorify God
  2. Get the log out of your eye
  3. Gently restore
  4. Go and be reconciled
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1. Glorify God
    - a. “How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?”
  2. Get the log out of your eye
    - a. How can I show Jesus’ work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?



3. Gently restore
  - a. How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?
4. Go and be reconciled
  - a. How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?