

A Soft Answer: Winning Without War

Proverbs 15:1-4

Introduction: The Danger of Disputes

Disputes or arguments happen everywhere in every day life. We have disputes at work, out in the world, in families, among friends, and even within the church. Conflict is a part of life, but as Christians, we are called to handle things differently.

The Bible teaches that avoiding unnecessary conflict is a mark of wisdom, maturity, and godliness.

Proverbs 3:30 gives us a warning: "Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm." This shows us that not all disputes are worth engaging in. We must discern whether a disagreement is necessary or if it better to walk away.

Today, we're going to explore Biblical principles on avoiding conflict, handling disputes wisely, and promoting peace. Remember, a soft answer will allow us to win without war. We don't want war. We want peace.

Part 1: The Root of Conflict: Pride, Anger, and Strife

A. Pride Fuels Disputes

Many conflicts arise from pride. Pride is an inflated sense of self-importance on one's own abilities rather than on God. Pride is the attitude that exalts oneself above others. Pride is often associated with arrogance, self-sufficiency, and a refusal to submit to God's authority.

There's sinful pride which is arrogance and self exaltation and then there's righteous pride which is confidence in God. The sinful pride is in Proverbs Chapter 16.

""Proverbs 16:18

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.""

The righteous pride is shown in 2 Corinthians Chapter 10.

""2 Corinthians 10:17

But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.""

The unrighteous and sinful pride is what fuels disputes, conflicts, and war. Self-centeredness, boasting, rejecting correction, despising others, and looking down on others fuels conflict. Satan thought he should be equal with God. Nebuchadnezzar boasted about himself. Pharaoh refused to humble himself. The Pharisees thought they were righteous.

""**Philippians 2:3**

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.""

If we can follow that commandment, we can avoid disputes. Pride makes us want to be right rather than righteous. Pride prevents us from yielding even when it would be wise to do so. Pride leads to division in work places, friends, families, spouses, and churches.

King Rehoboam, Solomon's son, in 1 Kings Chapter 12, was made king. The people asked him to ease their burdens. Instead of listening to wise counsel given to him, he proudly declares: "My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." The kingdom split in two creating lasting conflict.

B. Anger Stirs Up Strife

""**Proverbs 15:18**

A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.""

Hot tempers lead to broken relationships. Calm down. Don't get angry. Relax. Take a deep breath when you're angry. Don't be a wrathful man.

""**Proverbs 16:28**

A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.""

Gossip and backbiting create division. I've seen a pastor do that myself. A froward man soweth strife. They do these things purposely to separate chief friends.

Moses saw an Egyptian mistreating a Hebrew, and, in his anger, killed the Egyptian. His intentions were good but his uncontrolled anger forced him into exile for 40 years. Uncontrolled anger leads to regret. "It is an honor for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling."

C. Envy and Jealousy Stir Up Conflict

""**Proverbs 10:12**

Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.""

Hatred is sin. Not following God's commandments is hatred. If I steal from you, I hate you. If I don't steal from you, I love you. Doing wrong stirs up strife, controversy, division, conflict, and war.

People driven by hatred will always find reasons to argue. Love, doing the right things, will cover offenses. Get things right. Say you're sorry. Tell someone you shouldn't have done that to them. And that's doing the right thing. Learn how to apologize and say, "I'm sorry." Don't be jealous of others and start a dispute.

King Saul's jealousy of David led him to make David his enemy even though David was loyal to him. Instead of supporting David, Saul wasted years of his reign chasing David. Envy destroys relationships.

So, again, the root of conflict is pride, anger, strife, envy, jealousy, and hate. Doing evil causes conflict. Pride fuels disputes. Anger stirs up strife. Envy and jealousy stir up conflict.

Part 2: How to Avoid Unnecessary Conflict

A. Choose Your Battles Wisely

Not every disagreement is worth engaging in. For example, politics really isn't a battle I want to get engaged in. Me fighting with you about politics isn't going to get any of us anywhere. We have more important things to fight together against.

""Proverbs 20:3

It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling. ""

If something isn't your business, stay out of it. Always seek peace and not a battle or a fight. For example, Abraham and Lot had herdsmen that started fighting with each other. See how Abraham handled it.

""Genesis 13:5-7

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. 6 And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. 7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. ""

""Genesis 13:8-9

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. 9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. ""

And because of this, God blessed Abraham. A goodly person values peace over personal gain. But there are many people out there in it for their own personal gain. They are afraid they are going to lose something for themselves.

If you want to avoid unnecessary conflict, choose your battles wisely.

B. Be Slow to Speak and Quick to Listen

The Bible commands us to listen more. Stop talking so much and listen. Slow to speak. Quick to listen.

""**James 1:19-20**

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.""

If we follow that commandment, we will avoid conflict. A soft answer is better after listening to someone. You can win by not going to battle or war with someone. Swift to hear. Slow to speak. Slow to wrath. The wrath of man will not lead to righteousness. It leads to sin.

In 2 Kings Chapters 18 and 19, king Hezekiah was faced with the mighty Assyrian army. Hezekiah did not respond with fear or hasty words. Instead, he sought God in prayer and listened to the prophet Isaiah. As a result, God miraculously delivered Judah from the Assyrians.

Swift to hear. Slow to speak. Turn to God for answers. Listening to God and wise counsel prevents unnecessary conflict.

C. A Soft Answer Turns Away Wrath

Be soft when answering people. Grievous words stir up anger. Your words that you choose to use will make a huge difference in preventing conflict.

""**Proverbs 15:1**

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.""

When Jesus was falsely accused, he didn't argue or retaliate. Instead, he remained silent and even prayed for his enemies. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Sometimes, silence and grace defuse the situation better than words. Your words can cause the fuse to be lit and the bomb will go off, and you'll have a huge issue on your hands. Instead, try a soft answer or no answer at all. This will avoid conflict.

D. Walk Away from Foolish Arguments

If someone is being foolish with their questions and arguments, avoid them or walk away from them. Allow them to continue talking while you walk away. They may even mock you. It's okay.

""**2 Timothy 2:23-24**

But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. 24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,"

Avoid foolish questions. They gender strifes. We don't want that. The servant of the Lord must not strive. Instead, we are to be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. Hey, we can't just expect everyone to know everything about the Bible. Be easy. Be patient.

Don't argue. If there is a foolish question, bring it back to the right conversation. Avoid those questions. God doesn't answer everyone in the Bible. He avoids those questions at times. We need to seek God in conflict and that leads to victory without unnecessary strife.

King Jehoshaphat, in 2 Chronicles Chapter 20, faced a massive invasion. He chose to not go into a reckless battle. Instead, what did he do? He led the people in fasting and prayer. God answered by making the enemy armies destroy themselves.

To avoid unnecessary conflict, choose battles wisely, be slow to speak and quick to listen, use soft answers, and walk away from foolish arguments.

Part 3: The Role of Pride in Conflict

Remember, as we continue, we're talking about avoiding conflict when it's not needed. Sometimes, conflict is needed. But we're trying to win without war. We don't have to fight over everything. I want to focus in on the role of pride in conflict.

A. Pride Causes Leaders to Make Foolish Decisions

Many leaders have this arrogance and pride about them that they are going to do something no matter if it's wrong or not. For example, there is a Baptist church close to here where the pastor allowed an interfaith service. Why? Because of pride. That's a foolish decision that goes against God's words. That's worth fighting over.

Pharaoh's pride, in Exodus Chapter 5 through 14, kept him from letting the Israelites go. Even after God sent plagues, he refused to let them go. His refusal, because of his great pride, led to the destruction of Egypt and the drowning of his army.

Pride blinds us to truth and leads to unnecessary loss. It didn't have to be that way.

B. Pride Brings Destruction, But Humility Brings Honor

We are to be humble and not think highly of ourselves.

""Proverbs 29:23

A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.""

King Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel Chapter 4, is a prideful king of Babylon. He says, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" He thinks he did it all. There are many leaders within our country, federal and local level, that believe themselves to have done it all.

20 years from now, True Words Baptist Church will be much bigger. You won't hear me look back and say, "Look at this great church that I have built. I am so amazing." No, I know that this is God's church that he builds. Not me. Not you. Not anyone but God. He gets all the glory. I don't want any glory. He gets the glory. He's the one doing it.

Because of king Nebuchadnezzar's pride, God humbled him and made him live like an animal for seven years. I want you to see what Nebuchadnezzar said at the end of the seven years of humbling him.

""Daniel 4:34-35

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?""

When you start getting prideful, you'll have more conflicts. And your main problem will be the conflict you have with God. When Nebuchadnezzar's understanding returned, he blessed the most high God. He praised and honored him. Not himself.

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing. None can stay his hand. None can stop God. None can say, "What are you doing, God?" This would be foolishness, arrogancy, and pride. Don't start a conflict with God.

Pride causes conflict. Humility brings honor.

C. The Cure for Pride: Humility and Trusting God

We must cure the problem of pride within ourselves. We need to get rid of it.

""James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.""

In 2 Kings Chapters 22 and 23, king Josiah discovered that Israel had disobeyed God's laws. Do you know what he did? He humbled himself. He repented of this great sin. And he led them back to doing the laws of God.

We simply have to stop doing wrong. Repent of the sin. Humble ourselves. Get things right.

Trust God and his words. Don't believe yourself to know best. God says don't do this. But I tell myself and others that it's okay to do this. No. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

If not, you will fall. Conflict will come. And you will lose. Humility before God brings peace and blessing. Give in to God. You can't fight him. He is higher than you. Much higher.

Now we move to the final part that you need to know.

Part 4: Promoting Peace as a Christian Duty

A. Live Peaceably with Others

""Romans 13:13-14

Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.""

Don't do things that cause trouble around your home, around your friends, around your co-workers. Walk honestly. Don't riot. Don't get drunk. Don't be nasty. Don't be lewd. Don't just do whatever you want. Not in strife and envying. Instead, put on Jesus Christ. Walk in the Spirit.

Strife is a serious sin. Trying to make everything a contest to see who is better. Contention in anger or enmity. A struggle with others for no good reason. The sin of strife is not to be taken lightly.

""Romans 12:18

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.""

Sometimes it isn't possible. For example, a man might attack you and continue telling lies about you. Sometimes it won't be possible to live peaceably with that man. He stirs up strife. But, if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

B. Avoiding Division in the Church

""2 Corinthians 12:20

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:""

A church that has all of these things, such as debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whispering, swellings, and tumults is going to be a weak and horrible church. That right there would be a divided church.

""Titus 3:2

To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.""

Don't talk bad about others. We've all done this before. We need to speak evil of no man. Instead, let's continue doing the work of the Lord and put all that behind us. Don't be brawlers. Be gentle. Be meek. Be humble unto all men.

This promotes peace. That's what we want.

C. Be a Peacemaker

""Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.""

Peacemaking is an active role. It's not a passive one. We should always be making peace with others. Don't stir up conflict. For example, saying bad things about someone that you don't even know is not being a peacemaker.

Instead of stirring up conflict, seek to reconcile and restore relationships. Don't start fights. Don't answer with anger. A soft answer is you winning without war. You always win with a soft answer.

Conclusion: Walking in Wisdom and Peace

This world that we live in thrives on conflict. The majority of people out there are looking to start fights. They love conflict. But, as believes in Jesus Christ, we are called to something higher.

1. Choose peace over pride.
2. Respond with gentleness instead of anger.
3. Walk away from unnecessary disputes.
4. Be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker.

""Romans 14:19

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.""

Instead of being known for conflict, let us be known for grace, humility, and wisdom.

Is there someone you need to make peace with today? Are you holding on to some dispute? Do you need to let go? Please commit to being a peacemaker here, in your home, and in your community. This week, I challenge you to seek peace in one area of your life where there has been conflict – whether in your family, at work, or even within the church.

We will follow the example of Jesus Christ, who, though he had every right to dispute, chose the path of peace and reconciliation for our sake. We will do the same while we live this life here on earth. We won't give in. We won't allow lies. We won't be pushed around. We won't worship false gods. We won't shut this church down. But we will do our best to keep the peace.

Let's pray.