

Summary and Application

Although it is often best simply to overlook the sins of others, there will be times when doing so only prolongs alienation and encourages them to continue acting in a hurtful manner. If you know that someone has something against you, go to that person and talk about it as soon as possible. Similarly, if someone's sins are dishonoring God, damaging your relationship, hurting others, or hurting that person, one of the most loving and helpful things you can do is go and help him or her see the need for change. With God's grace and the right words (including your own confession), such a conversation will often lead to restored peace and stronger relationships.

If you are presently involved in a conflict, these questions will help you apply the principles presented in this chapter.

1. Do you have any reason to believe that someone else has something against you? If so, why?
2. How has the other person sinned in this situation?
3. Would it be better to overlook the offense against you or to go and talk with the other person about it? What would be the probable benefits and drawbacks of each course of action?
4. Is the other person's sin too serious to overlook? More specifically:
Is it dishonoring God? If so, how?

Is it damaging your relationship? If so, how?

Is it hurting others? If so, how?

Is it hurting that person? If so, how?

Is it making that person less useful to the Lord?

5. Which of the other person's sins need to be discussed?
6. Would it be better to go in person or to involve others right away? Why?
7. Would it be best to raise the issue directly, or might this person respond better to an indirect approach? How could you use a story, an analogy, or a point of common interest to open your discussion?
8. Do you need to confess any of your sins before you talk about what the other person has done wrong? If so, what will you do if the other person does not confess his or her sins?
9. Go on record with the Lord by writing a prayer based on the principles taught in this chapter.

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Ron Kraybill, a respected Christian mediator, has noted that “effective confrontation is like a graceful dance from supportiveness to assertiveness and back again.”⁶ This dance may feel awkward at first for those who are just learning it, but perseverance pays off. With God’s help you can learn to speak the truth in love by saying only what will build others up, by listening responsibly to what others say, and by using principles of wisdom. As you practice these skills and make them a normal part of your everyday conversations, you will be well prepared to use them when conflict breaks out. In developing the skills of loving confrontation, you can see for yourself that “the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

If you are presently involved in a conflict, these questions will help you apply the principles presented in this chapter.

1. When you talk to or about your opponent, what might you be tempted to say that would be harmful or worthless?
2. How can you offer hope to the other person by focusing on what God has done and is doing?
3. Which listening skills do you have a hard time with: waiting, attending, clarifying, reflecting, or agreeing? Write down some things you will do or say to overcome these weaknesses.
4. Are you trying to believe the best about the other person (i.e., making charitable judgments)? How could you demonstrate that you are doing this?
5. What can you say that would clearly communicate your love and concern for your opponent?

⁶ Ron Kraybill, *Conciliation Quarterly*, Mennonite Central Committee (Summer 1987), 7.

6. What is the best time and place to talk with your opponent?
7. Would it be wiser to communicate in person, on the phone, or by means of a letter? Why?
8. Write a brief summary of what you need to say and avoid saying, including
 - The issues you believe should be addressed
 - Words and topics to avoid
 - Stories or comparisons that the other person will understand and value
 - Words that describe your feelings
 - A description of the effect the dispute is having on you and others
 - Your suggestions and preferences for a solution
 - The benefits that will be produced by cooperating to find a solution
9. How could you improve what you intend to communicate so that you cannot be misunderstood?
10. Plan your opening statement. What are three ways that your opponent may react to this statement? How could you respond constructively to each of these reactions?
11. Write some of the “I” statements you could use.
12. How can you show that you are trying to be objective?
13. How can you refer to Scripture in a helpful manner?
14. How will you ask for feedback?

15. Go on record with the Lord by writing a prayer based on the principles taught in this chapter.