

Lutheran Women in Mission

When Christians Disagree by Ted Kober

Opening

Sing together "Jesus Sinners Will Receive" (LW 229, LBW 291, TLH 324) or "The Love Round" from *The Other Song Book*.



Even among the family of faith, conflict is part of life. Since man's first sin, God's people have experienced conflict. Cain murdered his brother Abel because Cain was jealous of Abel's relationship to God. King David had an adulterous affair with a married woman and then arranged to have her husband killed. The disciples argued among themselves as to who was the greatest. Paul's epistles address scores of disputes among God's children.

1. What Causes Conflict?

Misunderstandings, differences in values or goals or expectations, and competition over limited resources can all lead to conflict. But what significant cause does Scripture identify? Read **James 4:1-3**

Even if disagreements are not initially caused by sin, it does not take long before two sinners in a dispute sin against one another. From the following passages, identify some sinful responses to conflict:

- **Proverbs 26:20-21**
- **Ephesians 4:25-27, 29-31**

With whom is our most serious conflict? **Isaiah 59:2**

2. God's Response to Conflict

How did God address our conflict with Him? **Romans 5:6-11**

Notice that God did much more than simply resolve our conflict. He reconciled our relationships through Jesus Christ. Discuss the difference between conflict resolution and reconciliation in the following situations:

- A couple seeks divorce to end their constant bickering.
- A family transfers membership to another church to avoid those with whom they disagree.
- Two sisters confess sins to each other and forgive each other over disputes in their mother's estate, and then they agree to the final disposition of Mom's personal belongings.

3. God Teaches Us to Respond to Conflict

In the following Scriptures, review four basic principles for responding to conflict, by filling in the blanks:

- **1 Corinthians 10:31** Glorify _____.
- **Matthew 7:5** Get the _____ out of your own eye.
- **Matthew 18:15** G_____ and show your brother his fault.
- **Matthew 5:23-24** Go and be _____.

Reflect on a specific conflict from your past in which you became emotional. If faced with a similar conflict in the future, how might any one of the four principles above help you respond differently?

4. Living Up to God's Expectations in Conflict

Some people ignore any wrong-doing in their response to conflict. What does God teach about such attitudes?

- **James 2:10**
- **1 John 1:8, 10**

In spite of good intentions, we often fail to live up to God's expectations. What can we do when we realize our sin, and whom should we address?

- **Proverbs 28:13**
- **Luke 15:17-19** (the prodigal son)
- **James 5:16**

5. God's Promises to Those in Conflict

Upon our repentance and confession of faith, what wonderful gift do we receive from God?

- **1 John 1:9**
- **1 Peter 2:24**

When others confess to us, what privilege do we have? **Colossians 3:13**

Where do we find strength to do what God expects of us? **2 Peter 1:3**

6. Negotiating Material Issues

Issues of sin are reconciled through confession and forgiveness. Material issues are resolved through discussion and negotiation. What instruction for negotiation is found in this passage?
Philippians 2:3-4

7. Involving Others

When dealing with unrepentant sin, it is a matter that may need to be discussed with others. Rather than gossip or slander, what does Jesus require to involve others? **Matthew 18:15-17**

The Corinthians sometimes went to court to settle disagreements. What does St. Paul admonish instead? **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

8. Ambassadors of Reconciliation

God could have chosen anyone, even angels who are sinless, to be His special messengers of reconciliation. Yet, whom does He appoint? **2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

Why would a Holy God choose sinful people (i.e., forgiven sinners) to serve as ambassadors of reconciliation? **Luke 7:36-48**

Give some examples of how you can be an ambassador of reconciliation in the coming week.

Closing

Sing "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" (*LW 295, LBW 370, TLH 464*) or "Bind Us Together" from *The Other Song Book*.

Pray together: Heavenly Father, We praise You for all Your blessings to us, especially for reconciling us to You through Your Son Jesus Christ. Forgive us our sins, especially when we fail to live as ambassadors of reconciliation. Teach us to glorify You in all our disputes, recognizing and confessing our sins to You and to each other, restoring others gently, and being proactive to be reconciled. Through the Holy Spirit, give us the strength to forgive others as You have forgiven us. We pray these things in the name of Jesus, our Peacemaker. Amen.

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*If you'd like to learn more about responding to conflict God's way, Ted Kober has co-authored a 12-lesson study (student guide and leader's guide), *Responding to Conflict Confessionally, a Peacemaker Bible Study for Lutherans*. He has also written a study on "Confession and Forgiveness." Using contemporary stories to give a fresh look at this ancient subject, Kober demonstrates how confessing sins and forgiving others testifies to our faith in Christ. To learn more about these studies, contact Peacemaker Ministries at 1-800-711-7118 or see www.hispeace.org.*
