

Devotional
Thoughts for
Christians in **Conflict**

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Living With Conflict



When conflict strikes nearby, we are often the last to grasp its seriousness and the least likely to have a clue of what to do about it. One explanation is that many personal conflicts begin so innocently, with a simple misunderstanding, an offhand remark, a misread gesture, a difference of opinion, or a challenge to someone's authority. We don't see the threat, so the conflict looming on the horizon doesn't register. However, there may be times when conflict is clearly imminent and we welcome it with open arms. In either case, no one can really predict the dangers any given conflict will present or the painful consequences that will follow.

Jesus taught that vengeance and retaliation are godless reasons for standing toe-to-toe with another human being. He also said that hatred is such a vile emotion that it places us in danger of eternal flames

(Matthew 5:22). So conflict is not only a threat to your physical and emotional well-being, *it is a crisis of faith*. Blood-bought souls are in eternal jeopardy. No wonder God takes an interest! When we are conflict-minded, we are spiritually vulnerable.

At some point almost all conflicts become personal. Our relationships take the biggest hit. A hostile relationship is on the path to becoming a dead relationship. In a dead or damaged relationship, we are no longer able to demonstrate our love for someone we now see as *the enemy*. We will tend to think of any enemy as a worthless object. Objects can be used or abused. They don't count. They don't matter. When we fail to appreciate the enemy's humanity and begin to objectify him or her, it is easier to attend to the dirty business of systematically destroying that person.

It is also easier to blame an enemy for all of our troubles, to condemn this person as the devil incarnate, to vilify him or her with a thousand unflattering names, or to judge his or her motives as perverse, wicked, or stupid. The door slams shut on meaningful dialogue. Trust quickly dissipates. Without trust, hope disappears. Mutual instruction, learning, sharing, or showing compassion vanish. In conflict, a once vibrant relationship changes so dramatically that any potential for receiving the blessings God would like to give us through that relationship comes to an abrupt end.

When your relationship with another person is turning sour, so is your relationship with God. His concern is as much about your relationship with him as it is for your relationship with the person you now think of as *your enemy*. In fact, God doesn't even want to see you standing at his altar when one of your relationships is in trouble and in need of attention. He is offended

when we pray, worship, or commune with him while harboring hatred toward a sinner for whom he bled and died. Nor does he want you pretending that you are right with him when you are not right with others. That too will put your spiritual life at risk.

When your relationship with another person is going bad, so is your relationship with God.

Our heavenly Father wants us to make every effort to end the conflict and repair the damage before we approach his throne (Matthew 5:23ff.). That doesn't mean we can place our relationship with him on hold while we let our conflicts fester. It means we are to deal with conflict quickly and effectively so that our relationship with him will not suffer.

The Bible warns, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26,27). If you are embroiled in a personal conflict, make the effort now to bring it to an end, even if the effort only seems one-sided. Don't wait; time is of the essence.

Lord Jesus, help me acknowledge the urgency of my conflicts. Teach me to seek their early resolution so that none of my precious relationships are damaged or destroyed. Amen.