

Is Conflict Stealing Your Peace and Joy?

By Terry Sutter, M.A.

Published in the Christian Chronicle, November 2009

Got conflict? Perhaps in your marriage, family, workplace, or neighborhood? Don't know where to turn or what to do? Don't despair, there are answers, and there is hope. It's called Christian conciliation or mediation. Many of you are probably saying, what is that? Please, read on!

Christian conciliation is a process of resolving conflict and disputes in a peaceful and biblically faithful manner. The disputing parties sit down with an impartial third-party who facilitates the discussion of issues and assists them in finding mutually acceptable solutions. It's a very affordable and effective process with a high percentage of parties reaching an agreement.

There are many benefits to choosing Christian conciliation as compared to going to court. You can save money, time, reduce stress, keep matters confidential, avoid the uncertainty of litigation, and maintain control over the outcome, to name a few. When parties come together to negotiate in good faith and ask God for His guidance, they can usually find the best possible solutions for their dispute. Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Christian conciliation provides an opportunity to show through our actions that we truly believe in Jesus and we trust and follow His teachings. Jesus said "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone... But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more... And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church..." Matthew 18:15-17. This scripture makes it clear that we should try to resolve our disputes amongst ourselves and when necessary, with the help of fellow Christians.

Virtually any dispute can be addressed through Christian conciliation. Some examples include: family matters, marital, elders, teens; divorce issues, custody, parenting time; workplace, employment; community issues, neighbors, HOAs; consumer, business, and even church disputes. Conciliation is a voluntary process so both parties must consent to participating. Sometimes both parties have agreed to conciliation before contacting the mediator and other times one party contacts the mediator and asks that she contact the other party to see if he/she will agree to participate.

Even Christians are not immune to conflict. How we respond to conflict should be entirely different from non-believers, however. Jesus said, "...that you love one another, as I have loved you...By this all will know that you are My disciples..." John 13:34-35. We Christians should be noticeably different in how we conduct our lives because of our relationship with God.

Ken Sande, of Peacemaker Ministries reported the following statistics. Born again Christians in the U.S file 4 to 8 million lawsuits every year, often against other Christians. Thirty-two percent of born again Christians who have been married have gone through a divorce. Approximately 19,000 major church conflicts occur each year in the U.S. It looks like this is an area where Christians are in dire need of help. Many Christians don't know there are alternative ways for

resolving their conflict and disputes. The Bible instructs us on the topic of suing one another. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law (Court) before the saints (Christians)? 1 Corinthians 6:1. "But brother goes to law (Court) against brother, and that before unbelievers!" 1 Corinthians 6:6.

Fortunately, there are better ways to respond to conflict. Christians don't have to follow the example of non-believers and resort to costly and destructive litigation. We also needn't choose to avoid or run away from conflict, as these responses often make things worse. If you are unsure about how to confront the person you are in conflict with you may benefit from Christian conflict coaching. The conflict coach will help you prepare for meeting with the other person.

Conflict may be inevitable, but it does not have to destroy families, marriages, and lives. Christ died on the cross so that we can live victorious lives; He said "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you..."

Questions may be addressed to terry@christiandisputesolutions.com or call 602.283.9887