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19: SOLVING CONFLICTS WITH THE HELP OF FORGIVENESS

The essence of conflict is a difference of opinion. When two people hold opposing views on a subject, struggle is a possibility. If strong values are involved in the opposing views, the intensity of the conflict can increase. If pride is stirred into the mix, ie. "I am right and you are wrong", the ingredients exist for conflict that can exhibit anger, bitterness and a desire to make the other person pay. When conflict reaches the state of fighting, the thinking of the combatants becomes muddled by emotions. When participants cannot think clearly, it becomes even more difficult to work out reasonable solutions.

The fruit of unforgiveness is resentment, anger, bitterness, hate and rage. When unforgiveness is present, the heart becomes hardened and revenge and payback become the agenda. As Christians, God has told us that revenge is his domain and that our task is forgiveness. The reason why he takes revenge out of our hands is simple - we would not be objective or fair. When we feel pain, our natural instinct is to send back to the person who wronged us an equal amount of pain. This type of repayment does not help resolve a conflict. It only makes the situation worse. Forgiveness, on the other hand, produces the fruit of freedom. When you forgive, you are freed from the emotional connection that ties you to the offender. In addition, freedom clears the mind so that problems can be resolved more efficiently.

Principle: Forgive first, negotiate second. If you forgive first, you will be better able to sort out the conflict with an uncluttered mind. If you try to negotiate first, it is highly likely that positions will harden, confusion will abound and fighting will result. We all have one or two primary ways that we deal with conflict. The five approaches to dealing with conflict are:

- 1) **Competing**
- 2) **Collaborating**
- 3) **Compromising**
- 4) **Accommodating**
- 5) **Avoiding**

If you forgive first, you will be able to compete more fairly. If you forgive first, you will be able to collaborate, compromise or accommodate more effectively because you will be more accepting of the person. If you have forgiven, then there is no need to avoid. Forgiveness changes the tone, the feeling and the quality of the interaction. With forgiveness you will be able to address the issues with less confusion, fear, anxiety and doubt.

As Christians, we are called to love our enemies, especially when the enemy is our spouse. The only way I know to accept and respect a person with whom we are negotiating a



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conflict is with the love of Christ in us. Jesus forgave us so that we can forgive others. When you are next involved in a conflict, try forgiving first and see how this changes your ability to develop solutions and resolve differences. By forgiving first, and then resolving the conflict from a position of forgiveness, you put the emotion of the past aside, which enables you to more effectively look to the future. Forgiveness does not mean that you are weak or a push over. It does mean that you choose to release the unproductive emotion of the past event so that you can deal better with the present and the future. Try it and see for yourself.
