

Those who have come to God through faith in Christ are new creations (2 Cor 5:17). But we still struggle with sin. We see it in ourselves and we see it in other believers. Eventually it leads to conflict – sinful conflict – between believers.

But children of God have all that is needed to be victorious, i.e., to live godly, when there is conflict, by accepting our responsibility as children of God to put off the old ways of living and put on the new ways of righteousness. We are children of God who have the Spirit of God and are able to submit to the Word of God. Thinking through three important steps may help us.

I. *Step 1: incorporate God into our thinking*

Coming to God through Christ changes our relationship to God (*cf.* Eph 2). That should change the way we incorporate God into our thinking. Consider these examples:

Ephesians 4:1 – After three chapters of describing how great it is to be called by God, Paul tells the Ephesians to live their lives in a way that measures up to that calling.

Colossians 3:1-3 – Based upon the teachings in the first 2 chapters, Paul charges the Colossians to set their minds and hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Romans 12:1 – Having developed the mercies of God in 11 chapters, Paul uses it as a basic motivation to live in total commitment to God.

II. *Step 2: evaluate ourselves as God would.*

We have a tendency to evaluate ourselves as we want to. But we should do so by God’s standards and according to His goals and purposes. This is true whether or not we consider ourselves the “injured” person in a conflict. Here are four challenges to consider in evaluating ourselves.

1. *Remove the “plank” from our own eyes.*

Matthew 7:1-5. In conflicts I see what I believe to be the wrongs and the problems of the other person. Jesus says, first deal with your own problems. He implies that our problems and wrongs are actually bigger than the other person’s. What have I done wrong?

2. *Let our hearts be bared before God.*

Psalms 139:23-24. Let us plead honestly with God to reveal our sinful motives and actions to us. His Word is an essential tool in this process (Hebrews 4:12).

3. *Check for “classic” factors in sinful conflict.*

a. Am I thinking more of myself or the other person? (See Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:10.)

b. Am I speaking the truth? (See Ephesians 4:25, *cf.* 4:15.) This includes using the Word of God (His truth), evaluating our own statements by a standard of absolute truth, and distinguishing between truth and our feelings and opinions.

c. Am I sinfully angry? (See Ephesians 4:26, Proverbs 15:18; 30:33.) Anger leads to conflict. It is equally wrong to stir up anger, since it leads to conflict.

d. Am I tearing the other person down with my words? (See Ephesians 4:29.) Though our speech is the most difficult to control, it is important to speak wholesome words as God commands.

4. *Check for essential spiritual traits.*

Two important characteristics are being kind and compassionate (Ephesians 4:32). They mean being good toward others and being sensitive in what one says or does so that no hurt is given. This should describe my manner and my heart when in conflict with another person.

III. *Step 3: respond to others as God wants us to.*

1. *Seek their well-being.*

After removing the plank from our eye, we are to remove the speck from our brother’s eye (Matthew 7:1-15). When confronting a sinning brother, we work to “win” that brother (Matthew 18:15). We speak words to build up the other person (Ephesians 4:29).

2. *Remember what God in Christ has done for them and us.*

When there is sin, forgive one another, “just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). The penalty of my sin and theirs was paid by Jesus Christ. We cannot add to what God required in payment. Remembering the death of Jesus and the fact that His death is the basis for my forgiveness and for theirs, I should be generous and gracious, as God was to me.

This standard for dealing with sinful conflict can be difficult for many, because we may have forgotten the place that God wants in our lives. Christ “died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

We do not live for ourselves, we live for Christ. Dealing with sinful conflict is about God and not about us. We are to live for His glory and not our comfort. We live to fulfil His righteousness and not our pleasures.