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Conflict

*If possible, so far as it depends on you,
 live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)*

This instruction from the Apostle Paul is given to us several times in Scripture. Jesus, just after telling His disciples and followers to maim themselves, if necessary, to avoid falling into sin, also told them, "Be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50b)

Peace is hard to come by in our world today. In addition to the two major wars going on in Ukraine and Palestine, there are more than a dozen other countries with ongoing warfare, either civil war or terrorist insurgency or ethnic oppression.

Here in the United States, it has become the norm to attack those with whom you disagree — with words, often with lies, and sometimes with violence such as getting a gun and shooting people.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) And the Apostle James wrote, *Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.* (James 3:18) But peacemakers are in very short supply today. Not only do we not practice being at peace, we mostly don't even try to teach it or preach it.

I ask why this is so, and I'm sure that there are many reasons, from pride and arrogance and other forms of selfishness, through greed, all the way to simple laziness, wanting whatever we want without having to work for it. In short, our sinfulness is what makes us contentious.

A more important question is, What should we do about it? What should I, myself, do about it? Shall I go the world's way (which I'm sure is also the devil's way) and join the crowd, attack those who don't agree with me, and just be as ornery as possible? And while I'm at it, throw in as much stubbornness as possible? Or should I try to go a different way?



I could just throw up my hands and say, "That's how it is in the world today. I can't change the world. I can pray for world peace, and I do, but I can't bring it about." To which I can almost hear God replying, "I'll

handle the world. You do what you can in your little part of it."

There's a song that begins, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." And it's true, you and I can't change the world, but we can do something to make a difference in our own little space. Let's see how we can do that.



The first thing, the very first thing, is to ask for God's help. Jesus says that without Him we can't accomplish anything [worthwhile]; but with Him, we can "bear much fruit." (John 15:5) God helps us by the truth of His word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16). And, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth ..." (John 16:13a) We need to seek God's guidance, listen for it, and trust it.

The second thing, of course, is to make sure we have the right attitude; to take to heart Paul's admonition: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* (Romans 12:18) This may require an attitude adjustment, in two parts:

(1) Control our temper. Don't have a chip on our shoulder; don't be quick to take offense. Don't react to disrespect or disappointment or frustration with anger. Anger is almost never helpful. Usually it just raises the conflict level and makes a bad situation worse. Instead, ask ourselves, "How can I make things better?" Say a quick prayer for guidance; then respond with the Holy Spirit's wise guidance. And keep it low key — *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. ... A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.* (Proverbs 15:1,18) We should speak the truth, when that is appropriate, but always do it with love, rather than anger. *Whoever is slow to anger has*



great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

(2) Don't always be looking for something to criticize or complain about, as many people habitually do. We are imperfect people in an imperfect world. I'm not perfect, and neither are you. Instead of looking for something bad, we should be looking for something good, some reason to give a compliment or express approval. If we can let others know that we are for them, rather than against them, then we will be making peace, not conflict. But it is very true that we usually find what we are looking for. So let's look for the good. Quoting Paul again: (Philippians 4:8) *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* I'd add a slight paraphrase: focus on such things.

The book of Proverbs has a lot to say about wisdom and foolishness. One of its main messages is that those who are wise are happier, more successful, and generally much better off than those who are foolish. And it says, specifically and emphatically, that fools are contentious, and contentious people are fools. Here are some of its cautions:

It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult. (12:16)

Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions. (18:2)

If a wise person argues with a fool, the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace. (29:9)

Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. (29:11)

Most of us are familiar with Isaiah's prophecy about the birth of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah: *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6) And when the angels announced His birth to the shepherds, *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."* (Luke 2:13-14)

Jesus told His disciples that He had not come to bring peace on earth, but much of what He taught had to do with living peacefully with God and with others. Here are some samples:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take

your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:38-45a)

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Ah, yes, forgiveness.

Conflict damages relationships. Frustration, anger, and bitterness that are allowed to continue are poisonous, not only to our relationships, but also to our mental, spiritual, and even physical well-being. I have seen this, and I suppose you have, too.

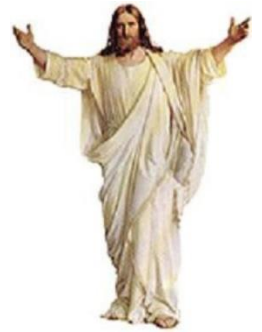
If there is unforgiveness between you and someone, the worst thing you can do is to let that continue, and the second worst thing you can do is to try to "get even." God's way is to ask for forgiveness, even if you are not the one most at fault, and to give that forgiveness freely to the other person, even if it is not wanted. Pray for God's peace, and do your part to be His instrument in achieving it.

There is too much conflict in our lives, in our world, today. Let's pray, with St. Francis of Assisi, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace [see page 3]," and then be receptive and obedient as God moves in our lives to answer that prayer.

And let us think (even if we can't say it out loud) that those who are quickly offended or overly critical of others should "get a life!"

Blessings and Peace to you, brothers and sisters.

Brother Roland



Abigail and David

(1 Samuel Chapter 25)

After Samuel died, David was still fleeing from Saul's wrath. He and his 600 soldiers moved down to the wilderness of Maon, where there was a crude, stingy man named Nabal who was very rich. David had protected Nabal's shepherds with their sheep and treated them well, and he asked Nabal to provide food for him and his soldiers. But selfish Nabal refused, with jeers and insults. Therefore David immediately swore that he would kill Nabal and every male in his entire household.

Now Nabal's wife, Abigail, was a sensible and beautiful woman. When a servant told her how her husband had insulted David, and that Nabal would not listen to reason, she took the servant's advice. Quickly, without telling her husband, she packed a huge amount of bread, wine, meat, roasted grain, raisins, and fig cakes on several donkeys, and set out to intercept David.

As soon as she saw David, she got off her donkey and bowed low before him. Quite unreasonably, she took the blame herself for Nabal's offense, and asked David to forgive her. She praised David and asked him to spare the life of her fool of a husband, saying it would be "a blemish on his record" and a burden on his conscience if David avenged Nabal's offense.

David replied to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands. For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would still be alive tomorrow morning." Then David accepted her present [food] and told her, "Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband." (1 Samuel 25:32-35)

Nabal promptly had a stroke, and he soon died. David thanked God for avenging the insult and keeping him from doing it himself. Shortly after that he sent messengers to ask Abigail to become his wife — and sure enough, she did.

A Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.



The "Good News Guide" is a monthly newsletter that is free, and freely available to anyone who wants it. I love to get a note saying, "Please put me on the mailing list." If you know of someone who wants it, let me know. For inmates I need first and last name, DOC number, usually their SID number, and address.

This newsletter is primarily for jail and prison inmates, but I love it when an inmate is released and still wants it. I just need your address. Keep telling me where you are, and I'll keep sending you the GNG.

If you have a question about Bible truth or the Christian life, I'll gladly share my thoughts with you, and maybe with readers of "Good News Guide." Write to me. **Note:** I don't have Bible studies or materials to send you.

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Conflict

Some of the causes and results of conflict, and some remedies. Enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

C N F T A M X K T N E M E G N A R T S E E D N V M P L H L O
 B T I N U R T U R E T R R R W R U J Q M I M M F W R S E U B
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 G S Y N W T B R E I U T A Z S I O S O C E N I E E F M D Z Q
 R A J G L T F F N S G S D G I E G A E I E N C S O R O V N A
 O P N E O T Z U Q A H T S G S R Y L H N L N H R O A T O V S
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 U N C N I W Z A Y I Q S D L U M L O V E D U D E H B F X T T
 W S H S S E L F C O N T R O L F F C A B D H J S Q T G A W X

Words:

*** Causes of Conflict**

- ABUSE
- ANIMOSITY
- ANTAGONISM
- BAD ATTITUDES
- COMPETITIVENESS
- CONFUSION
- CONTENTION
- DISAGREEMENT
- DISRESPECT
- ERROR
- FALSE ASSUMPTIONS
- FOOLISHNESS
- IDEOLOGY
- IGNORANCE

INSULTS

- IRRESPONSIBILITY
- MISCOMMUNICATION
- NEGLECT
- PRIDE
- REBELLION
- RIVALRY
- SELFISHNESS
- STUBBORNNESS
- TEMPER
- WRONG
- EXPECTATIONS

*** Results of Conflict**

- ANGER
- ARGUMENT

BATTLES

- ENMITY
- ESTRANGEMENT
- FEAR
- HATRED
- HOPELESSNESS
- HOSTILITY
- INJURIES
- PAIN
- PREJUDICE
- RESENTMENT
- SORROW
- UNFORGIVENESS
- VIOLENCE
- WOUNDS

*** Conflict Remedies**

- ACCEPTANCE
- APOLOGIES
- CALMNESS
- COMPASSION
- FORGIVENESS
- GENEROSITY
- HELPFULNESS
- HUMILITY
- LOVE
- NURTURE
- PATIENCE
- SELF CONTROL