

# Responding to Conflict God's Way

## Romans 5:6-11

One of my favourite psalms is Psalm 139. We had this psalm in our worship just a few weeks ago. The writer of the psalm beautifully paints a picture of God knitting and weaving us together, forming us in our mother's womb. The psalm writer says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

And we're all different, aren't we? Our personalities, our looks, whether we're left- or right-handed, and whole bunch of other things we could name.

Last Sunday, we heard in 2 Corinthians 5 that, in Christ and by his rescue, we're a new creation. Paul says in our reading today that, even in our sin, while we were enemies of God, we've been reconciled to God through the cross of Christ. We're God's saved new creation.

So what does that all mean for the way we deal with conflict? How do you ordinarily work through conflict? What's your preferred or maybe learned way? What do you think is God's way, and what does he say to us?

Study 2 of *Blessed are the Peacemakers* takes up the discussion of the ways in which we humans respond to situations of conflict.

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- What's your preferred, or maybe learned way?
- What do you think is God's way, and what does he say to us?

Let's begin to consider this today. In the example I used last week, I told a story of a scratch on a car in a shopping centre carpark leading to two people butting heads, then abusing one another with their language, then threatening and fighting, which escalates into an out-of-control war in a shopping centre car park. A situation which begins with an "Excuse me, but do you know you just scratched my car?" leads to a verbal exchange of insults, and then an escalating series of scratches, met with doors being banged against the other car, and finally a demolition derby leading to the ruination of both cars.

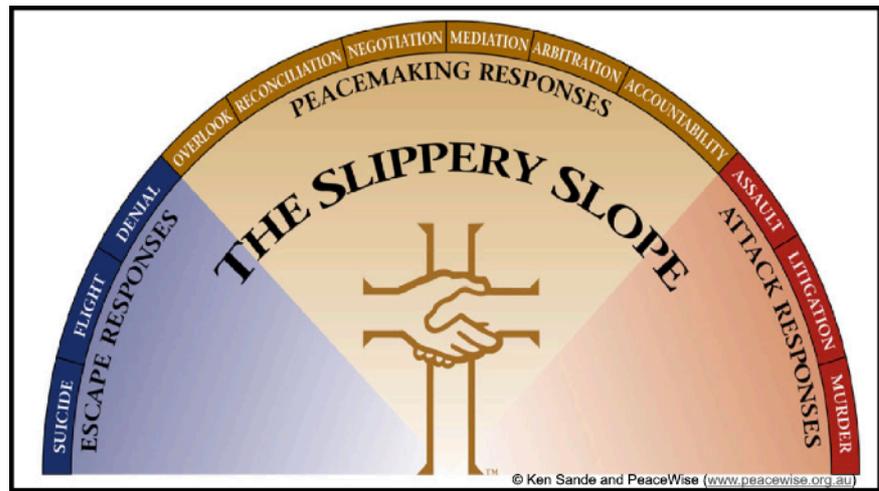
Fight! That's one way that people respond to conflict. If someone does something to me, I'll do something to them.

At the other end of the scale is "Flight". It's when you scratch the other person's car with your car door and just drive off, isn't it? It's those situations in life, at work, in the community, in the church, where we just run a mile at the first sight of conflict.

Fight or Flight. These can be the opposite ends of the scale of responses to conflict. The *Blessed are the Peacemakers* second study describes the scale in this way (see next page). In study 2, "Our Responses to Conflict", you'll be able to discuss what are suggested as:

- Escape responses,
- Attack Responses, and finally (thanks be to God!):
- Peacemaking responses.

The study suggests that we do well to consider how we ordinarily respond to conflict, and to consider what God is calling us to. In this diagram, it's not Malcolm in the middle, but Jesus, and a better way. Now, there is no perfect way to show this in a diagram, and I'll address this in a moment. But what I believe we are called to do is to consider, very actively and carefully, our response to conflict in light of God's response to the conflict of sin, which not only separated us from him, but as Paul says made us his enemies.



Hear this again and hear it clearly: Our sin makes us God's enemies. Not a good situation!

**And here's God's response:  
Christ reconciles us to God,  
even when we are enemies of God,  
by sacrificing his life  
to restore our relationship with God.**

And here's God's response: Christ reconciles us to God, even when we are enemies of God, by sacrificing his life to restore our relationship with God. God's goal in this conflict is restoration and growth. And he's willing to die to do it!

God always seeks the very best for his people.

That's why I need to comment on the slippery slope. Whilst it's generally a helpful way for us to

think about our responses to conflict, I want to point out very clearly that its not a wooden formula to follow. By this I mean that there are times and situations when we do stand up to fight against injustice, abuse, discrimination. We've seen this around the world with the response to racism.

And equally there are times and situations where flight is the right response, when there are situations of abuse, of danger. God doesn't want vulnerable people abused. God protects the weak, those without voice, those without power.

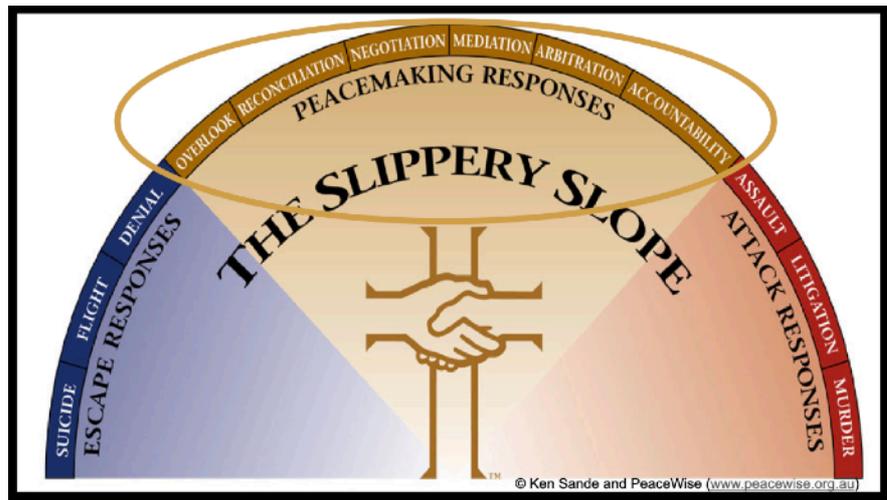
And so we also need to recognise the levels of power at work. In some situations, it's clear that a power imbalance exists, say in a work place. And so the person with the power needs to take responsibility for recognising this, and having a servant mind, like that of Christ.

So, just to be clear God does not want people to be abused, used or to put up with violence or abuse of any sort. He does not want his disciples to be abusers of power or people. His Word is clear.

But God does call us to work through conflict, especially in the family of God in the church in a way that listens to God's Word, hears the wrongness of sin, calls it out, calls for restitution, and brings the gospel to people to restore.

And each of the aspects (see next page) designated "Peacemaking Responses" places the gospel at the centre of these situations, ranging from overlooking something, through to Gospel-centred mediation, make it possible for Christians to lean into conflict with Christ at the centre.

It's been my experience over 25 years in the ministry, and a lifetime in the church, that Christians can be just like people who try to deal with conflict without Jesus at the centre. In fact, I would say that we can all be great confessors of Christ as Lord, but when it comes to protecting me and my self-righteousness, it's very easy to punt Jesus from the situation. And this is a very slippery slope.



So, dear friends in Christ, let us draw near to God with a true heart to confess our sins, to hear and to receive his forgiveness and work through the conflict together with him and in him.

*[At this point of the service, we shared the rituals of Confession and Absolution.]*

God chose not to attack us, nor to deny our conflict with him because of sin. Instead, he reached out to us in Jesus, stretching out his arms for us, while we were still enemies. This is God's love for us, and his gift for us in times of conflict too.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

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*Romans 5:10-11*

So, let's consider our response to conflict and grow in the reconciliation we have received.

Amen.

*Video of the service including the above sermon: <https://youtu.be/8jdw2yYFtLU>*