

CONFLICT RESOLUTION BY INTERPERSONAL MEANS

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Interpersonalism shows how people can befriend people they disagree with without feeling that they are compromising convictions in doing so. Accepting persons transcends approving of their ideas or even their deeds in some cases. Presence is not approval. So, interpersonal considerations provide a format for conflict resolution. We have to relate to people to have any influence on them, and we can do that on the basis of their potential for change. This approach underlies God's effort at the reconciliation process (salvation).

Conflict resolution requires establishing personal association, trust, and mutual respect before trying to hammer out doctrine and practice differences. Doctrinal agreement must come from a context of trust and mutual respect as shown in the manner of discussing issues. Resolving conflict calls for working with the people before working with the issues. People must be in a proper frame of mind before they are ready to listen to what can solve differences (John 8:37, 43; 16:12; Matthew 19:8).

Proper attitude, spirit, heart, and intent precede correct ideas, especially ideas about relating to other persons. A right spirit is more basic than proper understanding, because we can correct an incorrect person who has a correct attitude, but we cannot correct an incorrect person that does not have proper motives and attitudes. Furthermore, a correct person with an incorrect attitude creates more conflict, which makes the problem bigger.

Persuasion comes from personal power more than clear arguments. People do not accept good arguments from bad people or from people they do not trust. Persuasion does not come just from what is said but from who says it and how. People fear people that they do not trust, and they entertain the possibility that there may be a fallacy they do not see in their argument. Those they trust they can more easily agree with because they do not suppose they will intentionally mislead them. A trustworthy person can be wrong, but the hearer must evaluate that matter under any circumstance.

Conflict resolution occurs through interpersonal means as distinguished from legislation, physical force, or military conquest. Often this process takes the form of mediation. One person serves as an intermediary between other conflicting persons. The mediator filters communication between them, interprets the position of one side to the other, points out the strengths of one to the other, coaches each on how to relate to the other, and brings them into each other's presence.

This last item Barnabas did with Paul and the other apostles (Acts 9:26-30). Interpersonal relationship requires a certain amount of interaction. The longer people stay apart the more they build up in their own minds the reason for separation.

Motives and attitudes loom large in conflict resolution. That means not assigning motives to the other person because in most cases we do not really know what they are for sure. Besides, accusing them only drives them away. Demonstrating a respectful attitude means the other person can take down defenses, which allows more openness to a solution.

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