

Biblical Approaches to Conflict Resolution: The Role of Spiritual Maturity in 21st- Century Christian Communities

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Abstract

Conflict is something that is integral to humanity. Everybody is facing conflict. Conflict is a social interaction when two or more people or groups have a similar desire which is in short supply. The central mission of the Church is to reconcile all in Christ. However, a distinctive approach to the settlement of disputes is lacking. This paper aimed to use Biblical evidence to expound the process, strategy, principle, and approach of resolving conflicts among Christians. It adopted structural conflict and transformational peace-building management theories. The paper posited that conflicts can be resolved when parties accept their existence, engage in dialogue on matters of concern, and advocate for the way forward. Willingness to make sacrifices, separate where necessary, and accept new responsibilities to forestall future occurrences is essential. It is recommended that parties should be willing and open to talk frankly about issues affecting their relationship and accept responsibility to implement their part of the solution for peaceful co-existence. Conflict resolution is a vital aspect of the church's responsibilities, increasingly critical in an era where complex social, economic and religious dynamics present unprecedented challenges. This study explores the conflict resolution in Biblical perspective and the growth of Christianity in contemporary Nigeria. The study reveals that effective conflict resolution within Christian households creates an environment of peace and stability, which is essential for fostering the

broader growth of Christianity. By addressing and resolving conflicts, Christian families can maintain unity and strengthen their commitment to the faith. This, in turn, contributes to a more vibrant and expansive Christian community. The findings underscore that Jesus' model of conflict resolution is intrinsically the most effective conflict resolution, which can significantly enhance both individual and collective spiritual growth.

Key words: Approach, conflict, resolution, Church, and peace.

Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of life, an unavoidable concomitant of life. It is an opposing interest that occurs in human relationships. Some Christians think that whenever there is a conflict, the weaker party should simply apologise to the majority group for the sake of peace. The witness of the church in the 21st century is experiencing challenges with the advancement of information technology. Though the Scripture contains diverse ways of resolving conflict among believers, there is a need for a distinct approach to conflict resolution within and outside the Christian fold. The purpose of the study is to examine Conflict resolution management in the church through a biblical perspective to restore peace in Christian communities. This paper provided a Biblical framework for conflict resolution and reconciliation that will promote peaceful coexistence in society. By drawing on the biblical model of resolving disputes, such as in Matthew 18:15-20. The study of Jesus' Model of managing conflict in the Matthean pericope for spiritual maturity. This approach not only aligns with scriptural teachings but also encourages church members to actively participate in resolving conflicts, thereby promoting an ethos of reconciliation within and outside the church community.

The Concept of Conflict

Conflict is natural, normal, neutral, and sometimes even delightful. It can turn into painful or disastrous ends, but it doesn't need to. Conflict is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. Conflict simply is⁶⁴³. Jeong asserted that conflict is a social expression that involves at least two actors who express hostility⁶⁴⁴. Consequently, a conflict can be abridged as a clash between two people who have different opinions, most often those who have a mutual dislike. Conflict is an articulated struggle between at least two interdependent parties who identify incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals⁶⁴⁵. Additionally, conflict deals with the emotional, verbal, written or physical expression of differences regarding wants, needs or expectations between two or more individuals. Conflict unswervingly impacts behavior, decision-making, and the ability to complete assigned tasks.

Some people identify conflict as a process of social interaction connecting a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and desires. Gelfand avers that conflict is a process that begins when one party perceives its interests, norms and values, or opinions and viewpoints being opposed, hurt, or countered by another party⁶⁴⁶.

Largely, people see conflict with the images of opposition, fighting, adversaries, and other negative images. However, conflict can similarly be a very positive force, repeatedly bringing about critically desirable adaptation in response to

⁶⁴³ David Augsburger. *Caring Enough to Confront* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981), 11.

⁶⁴⁴ H. W. Jeong, *Conflict Management and Resolution: An introduction* (Oxon: UK, Routledge, 2010).

⁶⁴⁵ E. R. Runde & T. A. Flanagan, *Building Conflict Competent Teams* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

⁶⁴⁶ M. J. Gelfand, Robert D. Pritchard (ed.) *The Psychology of Conflict and Conflict Management in Organizations*, (New York: NY: Taylor & Francis).

external changes. Just as with fire or even water, it is not conflict itself that is good or bad⁶⁴⁷.

The Concept of Conflict Resolution

Resolution is the process of reducing complex things into a simpler form. It implies a sense of conclusiveness, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense. Thus, conflict resolution is the process by which individuals or groups resolve issues causing disaffection among them and bring about mutual acceptance of each party's existence in society⁶⁴⁸. Conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through several measures by working with and through the parties involved⁶⁴⁹.

The Basic Characteristics of Conflict

Conflict, in fact, is not necessarily bad. The Bible basically teaches that some of the differences are natural and beneficial.

⁶⁴⁷ Conflict is rooted in fighting or struggle for mastery, a quarrel. It is an opposing interest that occurs in relationships, an expressed struggle between at least two inter-dependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party. It is a frustration-based attitude or protest against lack of opportunities for development and against lack of recognition and identity. Conflict involves a perceived or real incompatibility of goals, values, expectations, interests, processes, strategies, or outcomes between two or more interdependent parties in their relationships. Conflict is not a problem in itself; it is what we do with it that is important.

⁶⁴⁸ S. G. Best, Conflict Analysis. In Best, S.G. (Ed.). *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa: A Reader* (Ibadan: Spectrum Press, 2009), 61-78.

⁶⁴⁹ Best, *Conflict Analysis*, 61-78. For example; It attests that not all conflicts can always be resolved; hence they can be managed or controlled through the exhibition of such skills as mastering emotion, effective communication, and broadmindedness. Conflict prevention is a proactive measure dependent on channels and intelligence coordination to control strained relationships before threats materialize in a conflict situation. The strategies for conflict resolution relate to the way people manage their self-image in relationships which is influenced by their cultural, religious, social, and economic background. Hence most people respond to conflict based on the way they learned while growing up.

Because God created us as unique individuals, humans must often have different opinions, beliefs, desires, perspectives, and priorities. Many of these differences are essentially not true and/or not wrong. This difference is nothing but the result of personal diversity and preference given by God (1 Cor. 12: 21-31). When handled appropriately, the differences can stimulate productive dialogue, encourage creativity, generate change that is very helpful, and generally make life more interesting. Therefore, although we must seek unity in our relationships, we must not demand uniformity (Eph. 4:1-3). Rather than avoiding all conflicts or demanding that others always agree with us, let us rejoice in the diversity of God's creation and learn to accept and cooperate with people who only see things differently from our perspective (Romans 15:7; cf. 14:1-13).

However, not all conflicts are neutral or useful. The Bible teaches that many differences are a direct result of sinful attitudes and behavior. As James 4:1-2 tells us, "Where do the conflicts and where do quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, from the passions that battle inside you? You desire, and you do not have; you murder and envy, and you cannot obtain; you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask." (NET). If conflict is the result of a sinful desire or action, it is too serious to ignore. We need to avoid the temptation to look away from or attack the conflict. We instead need to work for one of the atonement reactions to conflict, which can help us to know the root causes of conflict and restore true peace.

Types of Conflict

Intrapersonal conflicts are disputes that occur within a person over issues of life, such as time, career, and marital issues, among others. It is when you get confused, perplexed, and lack harmony within yourself due to human nature. The intrapersonal conflict of Apostle Paul led to the statement, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. For the good that I

will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Rom 7:15-19). Interpersonal conflict is a disagreement between two or more individuals in a relationship. Paul and Barnabas, who were missionary partners, had a quarrel over John Mark, which made them part from one another (Acts 15:36-41). Inter-group (International) conflict is disputes between groups, communities, churches, states, and nations. There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days (1 Kings 14:30). Intra-group (Societal) conflict is when individuals within a group or organization express their disagreement. In the family of Jacob, the wives, Rachel and Leah, who were sisters, had conflict (Gen 30:1-24). Another two sisters, Martha and Mary, had a conflict when Jesus visited them (Luke 10:38-40). Intrapersonal conflict is relational conflict that comes from inside an individual person⁶⁵⁰. It is an inward and personal battle within one’s own heart and mind. Intrapersonal conflict can easily be projected onto other people and situations. Throughout all situations, it is important to address the inward conflict because it will affect how conflicts with others will be resolved⁶⁵¹. This type of conflict is best dealt with through friends, mentors, and counsellors⁶⁵² in one-on-one moments of time. If a person is unable to address intrapersonal conflict, then all other types of conflict will be mismanaged or avoided entirely. Interpersonal conflict is relational between several individuals. A few causes of interpersonal conflict are personality clashes, diversity, communication breakdown, and sin. People should celebrate that there are many different personalities. God created people to be different. However, differences, or even similarities, in personalities contribute to the creation of conflict.

⁶⁵⁰ Everest Norma Cook, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), chap. 2.

⁶⁵¹ Everest, *Church Conflict*, chap. 2.

⁶⁵² Everest, *Church Conflict*, chap. 2.

The Main Causes of Conflict through the Biblical Lens

A conflict⁶⁵³ arises because, of course, there is a root cause in the parties involved in the conflict. The root cause is often not because of something negative. It might even be that a conflict occurs because the parties dragged by the conflict compete with one another in proposing good things or positive things. Conflict as a human phenomenon does not just happen; it occurs within particular contexts when parties fail to detect, control, and respond to crisis signals by being insensitive to conflict indicators. The contexts include culture, government arrangements, institutions, social roles, norms, rules, and codes in a society. Conflict-causative factors are complex and vary from one situation to another.

Satan

Biblically, conflict started in heaven among the angels led by Satan and Michael. The latter won and chased the former around the world. The Bible states, “For the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God, day and night, has been cast down... Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath”⁶⁵⁴. Satan causes conflict, especially amongst Christians, by setting people in disagreement with one another and with God. The three-point agenda of Satan on earth is “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (Jn. 10:10). Therefore, Christians and indeed all men are expected to always, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking

⁶⁵³ Conflict can be affective when individuals become aware that their feelings and emotions are incompatible. Conflict of interest is when people experience incompatible preferences for a course of action or plan to pursue. Value conflict occurs when people have differing ideologies about issues of life. Cognitive conflict is when two or more people become aware that their thought processes or perceptions are in conflict. Goal conflict is when people disagree about a preferred outcome or end state. Societal conflict has to do with unjust or unequal social relationships.

⁶⁵⁴ *Revelation*, 12:10-12.

whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Conflicts are caused or made worse by sinful attitudes and habits, which lead to sinful speech and actions (James 4:1-2).

Information

Disputes or conflicts can arise because of misunderstandings that result from poor communication (Joshua 22:10-34). Negative information can cause a crisis. In contrast with Adam and Eve, it was the negative conversation they later had with the serpent that led to their disobedience (Gen 3:1-6). The rebellion against Moses was triggered by the bad report about the land of Canaan they had spied out, given by Caleb’s teammates, of the presence of giants compared with the Israelites, whom they described as grasshoppers (Num 13:31-33). Negative explanations of information can also result in a crisis. The analysis given to Joseph’s dreams by his family was the chief cause of his brothers’ hatred (Gen 37:10-11).

Distraction in the flow of information among workers at Babel caused the tower project to be deserted. When God saw that their motive was evil, He decided to confuse their language, and no one could understand the other. This resulted in a multi-lingual world (Gen 11:7-8). The nature of information available to the parties, as well as mediated communication, can cause conflict. Another conflict promoter is gossip. The Scripture says, “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases” (Prov. 26:20). The feeling that the dominance of a particular culture is negatively affecting the economic growth of another could lead to resentment.

Prospective information or communication gaps, as well as withholding of vital information from family or organization members, may negatively affect the response of members. When rules and policies of an organization are not effectively communicated across the board, there will be poor understanding that may result in conflict.

Environment

It is the surroundings and conditions that affect natural processes and the growth and development of living things that comprise water, land, soil, and air, as well as the living organisms found in these entities⁶⁵⁵. Man's environment is multifaceted and vast, the aggregate of all the external factors and influences affecting human, animal and plant life and the development of an organism. It likewise includes physical and psychological territories like area of responsibility, status, and privacy at stake.

The conflict between Abram and Lot was triggered by environmental and economic factors. Their enlarged prosperity, population, investment, and scarcity of natural resources occasioned by over usage, in addition to the presence of competitors (Canaanites and the Perizzites), made the workers quarrel (Gen 13:6-7). Even with accurate information, something in the environment could still act as a hindrance in human relationships. When family members or organizational workers find it difficult to access available resources at the same time, conflict may occur. The situation and context of the parties involved could also cause conflict.

Most conflicts in many communities like Nigeria are based on land space and resource competition, scarce political and economic resources and competition, micro and macro social structures, population growth, colonial or cold war legacy, creation and location of local government council headquarters, poverty, marginalization, disputed jurisdiction of traditional rulers and other significant personnel. Environmental crises are worsening; therefore, there should be fairness in the use of resources to minimize environmental-related crises among families and groups.

⁶⁵⁵ J. K. Udonsi, *Health hazards of a Filthy Environment. A paper presented at a workshop on Environment awareness for Secondary Schools*, River's state Ministry of Education: (2004).

Envy

The dictionary defines envy as the “painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, joined with a desire to possess the same advantage. Where people envy the skills of those working with them in a family or organization, conflict is bound to occur. Skill is the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in the execution or performance of learned physical tasks. The wife of Jacob, Rachel, envied her sister and mate Leah, because of childbearing⁶⁵⁶. The contemporaries of Daniel conspired against him because of his commitment to his God (Dan 6:5).

The envy of the Jews accounted for the crisis that greeted Paul and his missionary partner Barnabas at Antioch (Acts 13:44-45). Envy leads to party spirit (I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos), and division among group members. Confusion and every evil thing are prevalent where envy and self-seeking exist (1 Cor. 3:3-4, James 3:16).

Values

Differences in values, goals, gifts, vocations, priorities, hopes, interests, or opinions can also cause conflict (Acts 15:39; 1 Cor. 12:12-31). Values⁶⁵⁷ are the feelings that are not open for discussion within a culture that are judged to be good or bad, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong, normal or abnormal, which

⁶⁵⁶ *Genesis*, 30:1-24

⁶⁵⁷ Poor delineation and handling of values can cause some people to be “busy here and there” resulting in conflict. A man charged with the security of another had conflict with his master for his carelessness when the captive escaped (1 Kings 20:39-40). The discrimination in food distribution among “native” and “foreign” widows in the early church caused some people to murmur (Acts 6:1). The first General Council of the Church was occasioned by converts’ attitude to the Jewish cultural value on circumcision (Acts 15:1). Selfish desires and party spirit can cause conflict (James 4:1, (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Disrespect for cultural and religious symbols as well as resistance of new ideas can also cause conflict. Respect for each other’s cultural values and religious beliefs will curtail the rise in conflict.

are present in a majority of members or at least those who occupy vital positions. Conflict can emanate due to differences in orientation, values, experiences, and perceptions of the goals of a family or organization. Human knowledge is incomplete and imperfect, so even sinless people in a perfect world will see the same situation differently through their own knowledge and perspectives. Personal values determine the way people act and the results of their work. A clash of values can cause unintended conflict because no two individuals are the same, nor will they work the same in any given environment, and with the same resources. Principles bordering on moral values, political ideologies, and religious beliefs are other factors. It is a known fact that individuals always disagree about the actions they should take because of their personal values. The door of conflict often opens due to differences in people's values and perceptions of the goals of a family or organization, methods of work, as well as who is responsible for what.

High standards of living and taste, as well as profound personal beliefs about their identity, can cause conflict. Where there is a noticeable threat to relationships or potential ones, power tussles, fights for supremacy, and personality clashes, conflict is bound to occur.

Competition

Competition for limited resources, such as time or money, is often a source of contention in families, businesses and congregations (Gen. 13:1-12). Unhealthy competition and rivalry lead to misunderstandings that could result in conflict. Families and groups (churches) experience disharmony when some people castigate others for cheap favour. It is expected of peace lovers to know what is written to counter false information. Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32). Conflict is inevitable, and it can occur at personal, family, community, and international levels as a result of the struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Jesus himself declares I did not

come to bring peace but a sword, to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (Matt 10:34-36). Again, in Him believers may have peace, but in the world tribulation (John 16:33).

The processes, progression or stages of conflict, as acknowledged by Simon Fisher and others as cited in Best, are Pre-conflict, when goals between the parties become incompatible and are likely to result in open conflict; Confrontation, characterized by sporadic fighting, search for allies, mobilization of resources, and strained relationships⁶⁵⁸. A crisis is the peak which leads to the destruction of relationships, properties, and even lives. Outcome is when there is a decrease, and room is opened to dialogue or alternative settlement processes. Post-conflict is when disputants identify and address the causes with the aim of preventing a repeat of the conflict.

Effects of Conflict

Conflict has the potential to harm the relationship between members of the family, church, organization, and communities, as well as affect their witness to the world. Through conflict, new entities are created in the church, community and nation. The national, regional, and ethnic crisis in Nigeria is responsible for some new organizations in Nigeria.

Conflict provokes research. In the midst of Harman's plot to annihilate the Jews, King Ahasuerus ordered extensive research in the royal archives, and the findings led to the promotion of Mordecai (Esther 6:1-3). In the Jewish fight against the early church, Gamaliel was bold to call for religious tolerance following his research findings on previous movements in Israel (Acts 5:34-40).

⁶⁵⁸ See Best, *Conflict Analysis*, 61-78.

Conflict hinders interaction, breaks communication among people in a relationship, causes damage to reputation, and wastes of financial resources. It makes leaders lose their grip on members, disrupts developmental projects, destroys communities, and even leads to loss of lives.

Biblical Conflict Resolution Approach: Bridging Divides with Strategies

The Bible prescribes a very wide range of tools for the internal resolution of conflict among believers. Fundamental is readiness to obey the word of God, which compels the faithful to dialogue and forgive one another. Our Lord Jesus said, “Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you, one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matt 18:15-17). Conflicts among Christians and with other members of the community can be resolved through the following approaches.

Acceptance

The first step in conflict resolution is to accept, recognize or approve that a conflict subsists, as no one can make an effort to solve a problem that does not exist. Acceptance is to regard as proper, normal, or inescapable the issue that is at stake. It is to recognize or admit formally the de facto existence of an issue or conflict formally, and that the parties involved are entitled to be heard. Here, the conflict is defined with a determination to handle it either internally or externally, which is by engaging a third party, such as mediators, conciliators, facilitators, and arbitrators. When God appeared “in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve acknowledged their nakedness and decided to hide from their maker. Hence, the question, "Where are you?"(Gen 3:8-10). In Abram versus Lot, the Scripture says,

“So Abram said to Lot, please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren” (Gen 13:8). In the Scribes & Pharisees versus Adulterous woman, the defendant was accused of being caught in the “very act” (John 8:3). The Apostles accepted that people murmured during welfare distribution which did not mean well for the Church (Acts 6:1).

Dialogue

Dialogue is a discussion or other form of conversation between two or more persons. It is a two-way communication that implies speaking and listening, giving and receiving for mutual growth and enrichment. It comprises witness to one's own faith as well as openness to that of the other⁶⁵⁹. It is not simply an exchange of ideas; in some way, it is always an exchange of gifts. In doing dialogue, “each side must presuppose in the other a desire for reconciliation, for unity in truth,” which implies that any exhibition of mutual opposition must vanish.

Dialogue is found in the very plan of God, who initiates and enters into conversation with the human race. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). It is the supreme value and strategy of conflict prevention and resolution, as it employs free flow of communication and information among disputants. It is to be carried out in a spirit of friendship, respect, open to all, and never compromising the truth. It requires wisdom, learning, discernment, built on freedom, and guided always by hope and love.

It places before the parties the genuine divergences on issues of life comprising faith, and these differences should be faced in a genuine spirit of fraternal charity, of respect for the demands of one's own conscience and of the conscience of the other party, with reflective humility, and love for the truth. It includes areas

⁶⁵⁹ B. O. Onu, & G. Vilawa, Dynamism of Religious Dialogue (Inter-faith meeting) and the growth of Christianity in Nigeria. *Jalingo Journal of Christian Religious Studies*. 4, (2020, May): 1-20

of common interest and concern, explores different themes and issues of faith, and permits questions, misperceptions, and misconceptions. Through it, people in a relationship let each other understand more about how they experience the conflict, which can cause them to reexamine their positions and feelings⁶⁶⁰. It includes the process of negotiation and discussion, which uses an oral direct approach and emotional restraint. It inspires disputants to “say what you mean and mean what you say, like the Irish saying, “what is nearest to the heart is nearest the mouth”⁶⁶¹. Gathering together is a major step in conflict resolution. Nevertheless, dialogue can be obstructed through threatening, commanding or instructing, criticizing, and name-calling. Other means are unsolicited advice, debating, interrogating, manipulation, and not listening. All parties are to respond to conflict punctually, courageously, wisely, and maturely analyse the problems to reach a godly solution.

Advocacy

Advocacy is a helper or one who intercedes on behalf of another, an advocate as a person privileged to plead for another. He pleads the cause of another, who exhorts, defends, comforts, and prays for another. He can be a humble and God-fearing senior disputant or a third party. Jesus Christ, the righteous, is an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1-2). Advocacy is the

⁶⁶⁰ S.A. Ucendu, *Conflict Management & Resolution: A better Approach*. (Enugu: Zubik printers, 2007).

⁶⁶¹ In resolving the first conflict, God interacted with Adam and Eve. The later were given opportunity to explain themselves (Gen 3:11-13). In Abram versus Lot, Abraham, afraid of doing anything that might tend to injure his character or bring discredit on his name, as one who had a strong sense of religion called the parties together, and talked over the issue. In Harlot versus Harlot, King Solomon gave audience to the two women in his chambers, and they shared their stories (1 Kings 3:21-22). When the Scribes and Pharisees went to Jesus with the Adulterous woman, the plaintiff presented their case though without evidence of who the defendant committed the “very act” with (John 8:4-5). In the early church, the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples in response to welfare crisis (Acts 6:2).

act of arguing in favour of, or supporting; the practice of supporting someone to make their voice heard. In it, we present our case and bring forth our strong reasons (Isa 41:21).

In Abram versus Lot, the former proposed the option of a change of location. "If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left" (Gen 13:9). In Judah versus Tamar, the defendant's evidence nullified her accusation. "When she (Tamar) was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law (Judah), saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Please determine whose, these are-the signet and cord, and staff" (Gen 38:24-26). In Israel versus Prophet Samuel, God asked the latter to heed the voice of the Israelites for a King (1 Samuel 8:9). In Harlot against Harlot, King Solomon proposed the use of a sword to divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to the other as a solution to end their quarrel (1 Kings 3:24-25)⁶⁶².

Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a voluntary deprivation characterized in a "giving up" of cheerfulness, status and the like, which is continually of some value to the one who sacrifices. It is to purposely give up (a piece) something of value, particularly for a particular purpose, to improve one's position on the board. It is the medium in which different religions and religious people are energized, nourished and sustained in their relationship with the divine and one another. Socially, it helps in bringing people together as they reaffirm their vows and strengthen their unity. Jesus underscored sacrifice as an essential virtue of a perfect life. "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever

⁶⁶² For example, in Scribes and Pharisees versus Adulterous woman, while the complainants argued that the defendant "be stoned", Jesus made a case for the accused when he stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, that he who is without sin among the plaintiff should throw the first stone at the accused (John 8:5-7). The Apostles proposed involving new hands to handle food sharing as to end the murmurings (Acts 6:3).

slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away... "Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:38-48). Sacrifice expresses humility, the virtue of considering others better than oneself, and it includes forgiveness⁶⁶³.

In Scribes and Pharisees versus Adulterous woman, Jesus sacrificed his schedule, gave attention to the parties, and even wrote on the ground for the sake of justice (John 8:8). In Philemon versus Onesimus, Apostle Paul offered to make personal sacrifice and refund to the former as to reconcile the parties (Phil. 17-20).

Separation

Where there is increased dispute, separation of the parties is a step in the right direction. Quarrels between co-wives who share a common residence will be reduced when they are separated. In God versus Adam and Eve, God separated mankind from the serpent and put enmity between them. Again, He removed the offenders from comfort zone (garden), and introduced them to hard work (Gen 3:15). In Abram versus Lot, the two parties separated from each other which ended strife between their workers (Gen 13:11). In Harlot versus Harlot, the resolve of the compassionate woman to be separated from her living child confirmed her honesty, helped King

⁶⁶³ For example, in God against Adam and Eve, God sacrificed His planned fellowship meeting and entered into settlement of dispute. In Abram versus Lot, the former sacrificed his right as the oldest and leader of the team, and allowed his nephew to grasp all the advantages for the continuity of his business and joy of his followers by making the first choice (Gen 13:9). In Harlot versus Harlot, willingness of the compassionate woman to make sacrifice as well as save King Solomon from committing murder gave her justice (1 Kings 3:26).

Solomon to identify the true mother, and passed right judgement (1 Kings 3:27).

In Herod versus the Holy family, the Angel of the Lord instructed the family to separate from the former's domain, and relocate to Egypt (Matt 2:13). In the Scribes and Pharisees versus the Adulterous woman, the plaintiffs wilfully withdrew themselves and the matter was dismissed (John 8:9).

Responsibility

A responsible person is "able to answer for one's conduct and obligations". It is the act of being morally, legally, or mentally responsible. That is, an action necessitated by moral obligation that is both established and restricted by knowledge. They consist of acceptance of guilt, repentance, accountability, and restitution, such as a refund of embezzled funds. Parties in conflict are to take up responsibilities that will remove idleness, distractions, and forestall future occurrences. Conflicts are resolved when parties become committed to a new and positive responsibility, which includes rendering and accepting of apology.

In God against Adam and Eve, the first defendant demonstrated responsibility by giving a name to his wife. God Himself went on to provide them with quality clothing to replace their human and indecent dressing (Gen 3:20-21). In Abram versus Lot, both parties took charge of their new commercial sites, while Abram settled in the land of Canaan, Lot went as far as Sodom (Gen 13:13). In Judah versus Tamar, the plaintiff accepted responsibility for the pregnancy and said "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son" (Gen 38:26)⁶⁶⁴.

⁶⁶⁴ For example, in Herod versus Holy family, Joseph "took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt" (Matt 2:14). In Scribes and Pharisees versus Adulterous woman, the accused was discharged and acquitted, and asked to "go and sin no more" (John 8:10-11). The

Communication of resolution terms to the parties is an essential aspect of responsibility. The early church communicated the decision of the Jerusalem Council to the converts by writing to churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 15:22-23). An idle mind, they say, is the devil's workshop. Empowerment of youths and just compensation will increase productivity and defuse the upsurge in conflict, especially for the unemployed in Nigeria.

Conflict resolution responsibility includes reconciliation, which is the process of rebuilding a relationship in the course of the conflict. Parties who experienced emotional frustration, depression, and loss of vision have the responsibility to go for counselling for restoration. The parties should responsibly apply their part of the solution. They can meet to reassure each other that the solution is being implemented, re-evaluate the effect of the resolution, and enhance their relationship.

The Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an integral part of the Christian life that every true believer should experience, as well as demonstrate to others. Some of Christ's very last words spoken on the cross focus on forgiveness. Jesus extended forgiveness to the thief who recognized that Christ was the true Messiah (Luke 23: 43-44). Also, we see the love of the Saviour being demonstrated as he unconditionally forgives those who have put him through tremendous anguish and unimaginable pain (Luke 23:34). Here, we see a clear picture of the reconciliatory work of Christ in action as preordained by the Father. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus, as well as Stephen, forgave their murderers in the hour of death, even when their attackers were unwilling to consider forgiveness and reconciliation (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:59, 60). Even though

early church solved the problem of discrimination as Stephen and his team took over the welfare ministry (Acts 6:5-6).

Christians hear so much teaching about forgiveness, forgiveness as a life concept remains very difficult to get their arms around.

As we are engaged in assisting others to find conflict resolution, we cannot ignore this blessed fruit of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. It is sad to say, but too few church conflict situations end with true forgiveness as demonstrated by Christ. David Augsburger asserts in a very poignant manner the dilemma that we find ourselves in. In a world of flawed communication, community is possible through understanding others. In a world of painful alienation, community is created by accepting others. In a world of broken trust, community is sustained by forgiveness⁶⁶⁵. Being in ministry for over 30 years, I can easily identify with the insight of R. T. Kendall through his experience when people repent of their harmful ways: If we wait for those who have hurt us to repent first, we will almost certainly wait for a long, long time. We also justify ourselves to stay bitter the rest of our lives⁶⁶⁶.

When we rediscover Biblical truths, we become more confident that the Good Shepherd will help us when difficulties arise. One of the major problems in the local church is that the offended member does not usually take the first step and go to the individual who has hurt them. This behavior is detrimental because the offending party cannot explain the rest of the story (Matt. 18:15-20). It is not necessary to share one's position and emotions with others before attempting reconciliation. Only when this process fails are we to take one or two other believers with us as witnesses to the dispute⁶⁶⁷. Finally, Gary Allen makes it absolutely clear that conflict management is not something we will ever get a complete handle on. In other words,

⁶⁶⁵ David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Forgive: True Forgiveness and Caring Enough to Not Forgive: False Forgiveness*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981), 78.

⁶⁶⁶ R. T. Kendall, "Forgiving the Unrepentant," *Christianity Today*, March 2005, 78.

⁶⁶⁷ Bryan H. Sanders, "Resolving Conflict in the Church," *Enrichment Journal Online*, Spring (2005), accessed 11 November 2006.

we will never completely arrive at the point of having everything under control. Conflict management is an ongoing process. In the pain and anger of conflict, pastors often want to resolve the situation immediately. This is understandable. But in reality, conflict management is a leadership lifestyle. A pastor minimises and manages conflict by using ongoing leadership skills and abilities. Conflict cannot be completely prevented, but pastors must be as preventative as possible in intentionally leading and training people⁶⁶⁸.

Divine Solution to Conflict

God is always concerned with the spiritual solution to conflict. How can sinful human nature and character, which fuel conflict, be changed? Stott further asks: Is it possible to make a sour person sweet, a proud person humble, or a selfish person unselfish⁶⁶⁹? The Church must change, viewing parties to a conflict not as individuals with competing interests but as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ caught in rebellion and bondage of sin⁶⁷⁰. Deep-rooted matters and motivations of the human heart, such as idolatry, anger, revenge, lusts and cravings in opposition to God are really better addressed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible declares that the miracle of salvation permanently takes place in human beings (Matt 1:21, Acts 2:38). Human sins are forgiven effected by the priestly death of Jesus Christ on the cross; eternal life is received by union with Christ, specifically his divine nature, manifested in his Kingly victory over sin, evil forces and death in the resurrection⁶⁷¹ (Acts 2:24) and the union presupposes an obedience to the prophetic demands of Jesus Christ (Mk 1:15). God's plan of salvation is

⁶⁶⁸ Sanders, *Resolving Conflict*.

⁶⁶⁹ John R. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity 1958), 99.

⁶⁷⁰ A. Poirier, *The Peace-Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 12-14.

⁶⁷¹ G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931), 20-22.

first to reconcile us to himself and progressively to liberate us from sin and our self-centeredness and bring us into harmony with our fellow men. Jesus Christ offers to change not only our standing before God but our very human, sinful nature and character (Mk 1:15). In John 3:3-8, Jesus Christ spoke to Nicodemus the necessity of being born again in order to see and enter the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul's statement: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold all things have become new," (2 Cor 5:17) sums up the New Testament's message of the need for a new heart, a new nature, a new birth, a new creation and new eternal life⁶⁷².

The doctrine of salvation is multifaceted and must be internalized in human life. For salvation to be meaningful in our ministry, all the theories of atonement, such as objective, subjective and classic aspects, must be interactive and drawn from each other. One should not be overlooked because they are essential for the full understanding of the death of Christ. The full understanding of salvation must result in the restoration of broken relationships between people and God. Christianity must be a practical way of living; a life of worshipping God, sharing, fellowshiping, mutual love and service in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Church is called upon to radically change, love, and serve the community by declaring the Good News of salvation, discipline and sacraments. We owe our forgiveness of sin and reconciliation chiefly to the death of Jesus Christ, but it is by the power of His Spirit that we can be set free from sin, self-centeredness and that we can be united in a fellowship of love in the Church. Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace, calls upon us to seriously carry out the divine assignment of peacemaking to the world. The Church, in turn, must prophetically challenge her members to engage in reconciliation, restoration and peacemaking efforts. Conflict, if handled well, stimulates dialogue, creativity and change. Sin and conflict, therefore,

⁶⁷² Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 99.

provide a golden opportunity for reflection, confession, repentance, spiritual renewal and radical transformation in the Church and society. This is the glory of Good News.

This type of atonement model reverses the fall and expiates human sin; it brings change and a closer relationship with God. This spiritual solution to conflict seems rather to have been ignored or untried by society, including the Church. It must be our prayer that the Church in Malawi will access the riches that God has made available to us, but which we seem hesitant to use.

Public Apology

There must be a complete turning around of the heart, newness of the heart, a change of attitude and behavior. The Public apology approach to reconciliation accelerates the healing of wounds between people. It would be a powerful, moving and memorable occasion if the conflicted congregations organised a public apology ceremony or rally so that people could come together and just say: “Sorry,” to each other, “I am not angry with you anymore!” Public apology parallels the public confession of baptism. Jesus Christ made a public confession not because of sin but to fulfill all righteousness and identify with the sinners (Matt 3:14-15, Lk 3:21). All Christian believers are urged to make a public confession of baptism, die to sin, be buried with Christ through baptism and rise with Christ from the dead by the glory of the Father and walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-10).

Prayer and Intercession

The Ministry of Reconciliation calls for serious prayer and intercession. Prayer is communion with God; it unites, communicates deep things of God. In simple terms, prayer is talking to God. Since God is the Divine Person, through serious prayer and intercession, people make contact with the Living God. They “cast all their care and anxiety upon God” (1 Pet 5:7),

making “their supplications, requests, petitions, prayers with thanksgiving known to God for all men” (2 Tim 2:1-2). Prayer is the means of expressing our feelings and thoughts to God about the situation in which we find ourselves.

In intercession, we bring to the consciousness of God all our hopes, fears, frustrations, the selfishness, courage and our cowardice, the love and joy that we find within ourselves. To stimulate reconciliation and peace, Churches must be prepared to engage in prayer in favour of individual Churches, their leaders and the nation.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The work of Christ on the cross is the presupposition of the redemption of human character by means of forensic justification: forgiveness of sin, the giving of eternal life through intimate union with Christ and repentance by sanctification⁶⁷³. It is the Holy Spirit who enables this intimate relationship. Jesus Christ spoke of new life received by new birth and connected that with the work of the Spirit (Jn 3:5-6). The fundamental role of the Spirit is to enable intimate relationships between persons. The Holy Spirit plays this noble role as a person. He bears witness, speaks, teaches, guides, and converses with Christian believers about the things of God and what He has heard from Jesus Christ (Jn 14:26, 16:12-13, Acts 10:19-20). The role of the Holy Spirit is to soften hearts. The Holy Spirit moves powerfully in the conflicting parties, softening the heart to truly hear and believe in what Christ has taught through the word. He moves people to relate to one another in love closely.

A relationship to Christ as King is not one-sided; receiving his benefits involves a response. In return, citizens of the kingdom are expected to be loyal to their King, obey his laws and serve

⁶⁷³ H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness* (London: Nisbet & Company, 1934), 297-9.

the kingdom. The King desires that citizens live in harmony and does what he can to facilitate this. To maintain law and order, the King creates and enforces structures that oversee the smooth running of the Kingdom. In times of conflict, the king enforces his laws of justice to provide human harmony and reconciliation. The subjects have to follow the example of their king, internalize and apply the law in their lives. They obey his law, his will and in this obedience comes order.

Here, there are probably two aspects in relation to reconciliation. First is what Christ has done to facilitate reconciliation between individuals in His action as prophet, priest and king. Second, there is the action of the Church in relation to the offices of Christ, and empowered by the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who internalizes the relationships between Christian believers by promoting brotherly affection, love, reconciliation and peace (Jn 15:26, 16:13-15, 1 Cor 13, 1 Jn 3:11-24).

Jesus' Model of Managing Conflict in Matthean Pericope for Spiritual Maturity

This section will start describing the kinds of conflicts faced by Jesus then it will discuss some ideas about conflict resolution afterwards. When discussing kinds of conflict, some biblical passages will be intentionally selected. Mostly, those passages will be in the book of Matthew.

Spirit of Humility Matthew 18:1-5

In this special event, Jesus teaches humility to his disciples. This idea is reflected in the words of Jesus, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 18:4 NAS). In the life of the disciples, they should have this nature.

Apostles have their desire to be one in the kingdom of Christ. This is one of their greatest desires among them. The problem is that they need to have a quality that is matched with the

kingdom of Jesus. If they fail to have this quality, then they will not have the chance. Their desire is not supported by their trait. They have their own concept of the kingdom's greatness. However, their concept of the greatness of the kingdom was not supported by their character. The character is humility. They feel superior to the other friend. This is not the character that fits the kingdom of Christ. Jesus taught that what is considered great in His kingdom is the humble one⁶⁷⁴.

Humility is seeing oneself as no more important than anyone else. Spiritually, Humility means recognizing personal unworthiness and inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation wholly. Humility depends entirely on God's mercy for Forgiveness and salvation. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Saviour, who offered up himself as the perfect sacrifice for all sins. Humility is not about self-esteem; it is about Christ-esteem. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of peace where there is no conflict. Humility is the nature which can help to get rid of conflict. So, one way to solve problems that occur in a family is humility.

Pauline humility is likened to Jesus' model of humility. It is widely believed that the Apostle Paul wrote the Epistle of Ephesians while he was in a Roman prison⁶⁷⁵. Willard Taylor, in his commentary on Ephesians, writes: Paul seeks to demonstrate that the redemptive plan of God involves essentially the unity of man and the cosmos with himself. At the heart of the order of things, there exists a deep rift. Man, and God are tragically alienated. Likewise, the world in which man lives is disunited, naturally, morally and socially. Discord is the more characteristic train of man himself and the world around him⁶⁷⁶. For Paul, unity is crucial, and it is through

⁶⁷⁴ G. J. Albrecht & M. J. Albrecht, *Matthew. The People's Bible* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House, 1996), 260.

⁶⁷⁵ Taylor H. Willard, "Ephesians," in *Beacon Bible Commentary: Volume IX Galatians through Philemon* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry, 2011), 134, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁷⁶ Taylor, "Ephesians," 132.

Jesus that the church will achieve it⁶⁷⁷. This letter is written to address unity in the church. Ephesians 4⁶⁷⁸ specifically addresses unity within the body of Christ. In this part of Paul's letter, he teaches the church in Ephesus the attitudes and behaviors needed to keep unity within the fellowship of believers. The practice of these attitudes and behaviors speaks to how the church today should navigate conflict.

In these three verses, Paul tells the church they must live a worthy life, which is determined by a person's humility, gentleness, patience, love, and unity⁶⁷⁹. Humility is when people see themselves through God's eyes⁶⁸⁰ and do not allow pride, supremacy, and arrogance to get in the way. Humility is also the willingness to surrender to God's authority. Gentleness is not a lack of power, but controlled power. It is also not an absence of strength but requires a vast amount of it. Gentleness is the strength to control one's power. Patience is expectantly waiting for God and believing that God's time, place, and action are right. The love that Paul wrote about, ἀγάπη in Greek, echoes the message Jesus gives his disciples in John 13:34, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Paul instructs the people not only to love, but to "bear with one another in love." It is easy to love when there is no suffering, pain, or difficulty in the relationship, but to "bear with one another" means to persist, tolerate, endure, and suffer through all circumstances. Simply stated, it means to love regardless. When Paul speaks about unity, he tells the Ephesians to make

⁶⁷⁷ Taylor, "Ephesians," 134.

⁶⁷⁸ See in Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul writes, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

⁶⁷⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁸⁰ Max E. Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 140, ProQuest Ebook Central.

every effort to keep it. Paul wants the believers to put forth all of their effort and to be diligent to maintain unity within the fellowship.

Spirit to Redeem Matthew 18:15-20

Matthew 18:15-20 is the Scripture that most Christian leaders use to inform their methods of congregational conflict management. To understand the instructions of Jesus in these verses, it is imperative to look at the pericopes that come before and after Matthew 18:15-20. It is also important to understand the honour/shame culture Jesus spoke into when he gave these instructions to his disciples⁶⁸¹. The pericope that follows is Matthew 18:21-35 and is focused on forgiveness. Jesus instructs his disciples to not only forgive once or seven times, but to forgive seventy-seven times. He then told the parable of the unforgiving servant. These verses reinforce the intent of Matthew 18:15-20 in that it is not conviction, but reformation, and not condemnation, but salvation, to which Jesus is referring⁶⁸².

One passage of the bible that is used by scholars to deal with conflict resolution is Matthew 18:15-17. This bible section summarizes the steps that need to be followed by the disciples of Jesus when they are in conflict. Although the actual story is about a man who commits a sin which is not related to another.

⁶⁸¹ Rikard Roitto, said that the pericope before Matthew 18:15-20 is the parable of the lost sheep in verses 10-14. In Matthew 18:12, a sheep “has gone astray” and the shepherd leaves the herd to go and find that one lost sheep. When the sheep is found, the shepherd rejoices over it and brings it back to the herd. Jesus uses this parable to reveal how much God cares for his “little ones” and illuminate the goal of his desire to bring the “little ones” back into the community when they have gone astray (“Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20,” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 79 (2014): 106, <http://ths.divaportal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1357447&dswid=-7044>).

⁶⁸² Roitto, “Reintegrative Shaming and a Prayer Ritual of Reintegration in Matthew 18:15-20,” 106; R.A. Douglas Hare, *Interpretations: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 214, Kindle.

However, this verse has been used to be a method of resolving conflicts among church members. In addition, these verses may also become a principle of family conflict resolution. If one church member commits a deliberate sin and makes no effort to change his or her behavior, other fellow Christians should make an effort to convert. The brother who stumbles is manifestly the same as the “one sheep” that “went astray”; they need to be found. They need our help to be redeemed.

Albert & Albert commented that even if the sin does not directly affect a person, however, if he or she knows about it, God requires a personal effort to discuss and settle the sin⁶⁸³. The talent of inspiration is a sacred trust, one for which we will unavoidably be called upon to give account in the Day of Judgment. So it is a must for a Christian to take care of other friends who fall into sin. It can be a blessing for them.

If this step works successfully, the fellow friend who sins won, then the effort ceases. However, if this step fails, then a Christian does not stop. In the case that the friend does not admit his wrongdoing or change his course of action, and make right, as far as possible, the wrongs of the past. The next step should be performed.

The next step is to take one or two others to accompany them to help. In this case, credibility is important. These accompanying friends should be chosen carefully. They should be mature Christians and have no problem with the erring brother. The reason is that their presence will help to save the erring brother. The main purpose, that is to win a friend, will not be reached or at least difficult to reach.

The next thing that should be done is to bring this matter to the church. It has been understood that this church is a Christian congregation where the erring brother and those who are in the process of winning him or her belong. This action is intended

⁶⁸³ Albrecht, & Albrecht, *Matthew*.

to impress the brother that he is important to the church; however, his sins need to be cleansed⁶⁸⁴.

Spirit to Avoid (Matt. 2:13-15; 19-23)

At the time, right after the birth of Jesus, he faced conflict. When the Magi come to find the place of his birth, they were asking the place up to the king Herod. News that they brought up to the king drove him to a desire to know where or who the newborn king is. However, he also sought to kill Him. This shows the conflict that Jesus faced even though He was still an infant.

Immediately after these wise men saw Jesus, the angel of the Lord told them to take another way home. And at the same time, the angel told Joseph to go away to Egypt "Because Herod will seek the young child to destroy him (vs. 14). When the angel warns that Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him, the language used conveys the sense of an imminent danger. Wasting no time, therefore, Joseph and his family leave town by night and head for Egypt.

This biblical passage provides implications that the conflict is inevitable for man. Humanly speaking, it starts at infancy. The way of the angel told Joseph to take Jesus to Egypt is a portrait of one way of handling conflict. The way which is shown here is avoidance. Because the Bible further states that after the death of Herod, the angel told Joseph and his family to return to Israel, and they settled in Nazareth. Gardner gave his view about this by saying that Christian sometimes needs to flee from hostile powers⁶⁸⁵. And he asserts that while doing this, God has His deliverer who runs with Christians in their way, looking for a place of refuge. He also stressed that in a Christian place of comfort is subject to disruption at any moment. These

⁶⁸⁴ Albrecht, & Albrecht, *Matthew*.

⁶⁸⁵ R. B. Gardner, *Matthew. Believers church Bible commentary* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press.1991), 53.

ideas gave some principles that Christian's life is always in a state of conflict, and then while in conflict, Christian may flee.

Spirit of Silence (Matt. 27:13-14)

The following is the attitude of Jesus while he was before Pilate. After Jesus was sentenced by the council to be killed. He was brought to Pilate. Judged before Pilate, Jesus faced conflict.

When he was asked some questions, the Bible explained that: And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. (Mat 27:13-14 KJV). Here, Jesus showed another way to deal with conflict. Jesus didn't say anything. When he was asked by Pilate, he answered nothing. When Christians get involved in a conflict, silence is one way to deal with it.

Spirit to Keep Stay on God's Word (Matt. 4:1-11)

This biblical account is about the temptation of Jesus that Jesus faced in the wilderness. It was said that "Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (4:1)." It was recorded in the previous chapter that Jesus was just baptised (Mat 3:13-17), and proclaimed by God the Father as His Son. Then, after fasting forty days and nights, Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted.

In the wilderness, Jesus faced His conflict with Satan. It cannot be sanctioned that Jesus is God. He is not a sinner and even never sinned. However, He is open to temptation and can sin. In this condition, when He faced temptation, Jesus was fully spiritual. It is generally believed that, when a person is just baptised, fasting, and even led by the Holy Spirit, that person is spiritual. So, as a human, Jesus is spiritual. However, even though He is full of spirit, He is faced with conflict. This fact gives implications that there is no place where a person is free from conflict. It is assumed that conflict is the fruit of sin. It

became part of humanity when they fell into sin. And only those who are in sin will face conflict. On the other hand, those who are living in accordance with God will not face a conflict. But Jesus' temptation shows that even a faithful person will face conflict.

The conflict that was faced by Jesus at the first temptation related to the love of God and the will of God. Wiersbe, W. W., expanded the question of Satan by saying if Jesus is the Son of God, why does he get hungry? And if the Father is love, how does He bring Jesus into the terrible wilderness? And Satan continues to ask Jesus to exercise His divine power to meet His own need⁶⁸⁶. Jesus refused to do this proposal because He did not want to use power for personal need. But there was a reason for Jesus to turn down this suggestion. He was tempted to use his divine power to relieve his physical hunger and not to rely on the Father, who had already miraculously sustained him for 40 days. During his entire ministry, Jesus never once used his divine power for his personal benefit⁶⁸⁷.

There are at least two implications that Jesus shows here in relation to how to deal with conflict. First is people need to put spiritual needs first than physical or other needs. When Jesus said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, it means that feeding on the Words of God is more important than physical food⁶⁸⁸. Second is that people need to avoid allowing circumstances to dictate their actions. In every situation, a person needs to follow God's instructions. Jesus could turn the stone into bread; however, He did not. This action shows that Jesus is dependent on God for whatever He does (John 5:30; 6:38).

⁶⁸⁶ W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. Mt 4:1 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books. 1996).

⁶⁸⁷ Albrecht, & Albrecht, *Matthew*. 49.

⁶⁸⁸ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition*.

Spirit to Compromise (Matt. 8:28-34)

This pericope portrays Jesus' encounter with Satan in the country of the Gadarenes. There, He met two men possessed by devils. Satan, who possessed these two men, asked Jesus to send them away to the herd of swine. Then Jesus granted. In this short biblical account, Jesus shows, in a conflict, that sometimes people need to allow what the opponent wants. When they ask something that does not harm the organization. Or when the petition is not contrary to the welfare of human life.

Conclusion

Navigating conflicts is an inescapable part of life. Disagreements are bound to arise in personal relationships, work environments, or community dynamics. Thus, conflict is an integral part of human interaction, inevitable, and of different classifications. It is triggered by Satan, negative management of information, environmental resources, envy, and response to individual and group values. It has both positive and negative effects depending on how it is handled. Conflicts are resolvable, particularly among Christians who are called to a peaceful relationship with one another, and indeed with all men (Rom 12:18; Heb 12:14). There are diverse ways of resolving interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. The 21st-century Church is in dire need of a defined conflict resolution approach for effective witness of the love of God to the world. The use of diplomacy only offers a provisional settlement of disputes. Even issues ruled on at the Supreme Court are later reconsidered in different forms. Our proofs exposed authenticity in the settlement of conflict. Hence, the Biblical approach should be adopted in conflict resolution at the family, church, community, and society levels. The approach will usher in true reconciliation, which is the emphasis of Christian ministry. It will also uphold acceptability, forgiveness that opens the door for a good relationship, and increased peaceful coexistence in society.