



Biblical Conflict Management

¹"I love You, O LORD, my strength."

*²The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

***³I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.***

— Psalm 18:1-3

In the secular business world, seminars are held to train employees in conflict management. This is the world's wisdom for the perceived correct way to handle a breakdown between almost anyone, customer and co-worker alike. Most Christians (in the West, at least) gravitate to this thinking as well. They may know that Christians are to love both their neighbor and their enemy, but when coming into conflict with either one, most of us defer to the world's ways. Scripture, and particularly the Psalms, have a wealth of instruction to the contrary.

There is an old and common rule of Bible interpretation stating that while *everything* in God's Word is important, something that is repeated twice is *especially* important. Psalm 18, the longest of all the published psalms attributed to the authorship of David, is also found in 2 Samuel 22. This is not coincidental as this happens to be a central text teaching the biblical approach to handling conflict. The historical King David experienced conflict almost more than anyone else in recorded Scripture, having to deal with enemies from nations outside Israel, enemies from inside Israel, betrayal and dissension by fellow Israelites, members of his own clan, his family, and even King Saul and some of his staff at the political level. This man of God serves as a role model for how to properly deal with all these situations as we in turn experience them, so it is no surprise that through him the definitive Bible text addressing conflict management is not only provided by the hand of his authorship, but by the Holy Spirit's inspiration it is published twice in the Old Testament. It is a teaching demanding our attention.

This is going to be a shortened version of a more detailed [Walk with the Word Bible study on Psalm 18](#). And as complete a teaching as Psalm 18 is in itself, there is much more in the pages of God's Word to instruct and, yes, even rebuke us in our manner of handling conflict with *anyone* on *any* level. Hopefully, this will explain why one of my frequent hot button topics is Christian behavior in all the cyberspace venues such as messaging, Twitter, Facebook, and the Internet in general. Nowhere is an almost universal Christian deference to the world's ways over God's in this regard more frequently displayed than within those mediums.

The Foundation

This Psalm begins with one of the longest notes on its context and authorship.

For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said,

One of the reasons it is presented a second time in 2 Samuel 22 is to present it within the historical context of the seminal event which inspired it. Whereas the world would view the outcome as favorable and a win for David personally, Scripture shows how God was really at work as well as the greater spiritual condition of both parties, particularly the so-called “winner”. Readers are encouraged to study that episode in detail and compare it to this Davidic testimony of what really transpired.

But note in the opening verses all the common terms relating to David’s position and stance when he came under attack:

*¹I love You, O LORD, **my strength.***
*²The LORD is **my rock** and **my fortress** and **my deliverer.**
My God, **my rock**, in whom I take **refuge**;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, **my stronghold.***
*³I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
And I am saved from my enemies.*
— Psalm 18:1–3

There is no mention at this point of going out to take on the enemy, but repeated synonyms for running decidedly to the Lord to take up a defensive posture from a heavily secure and fortified position. This is reinforced by the use of so many related synonyms assigned to God as a strong, reinforced position. Instead of sounding the battle trumpet used when engaging an adversary, David defers to “*the horn of my salvation*” to proclaim from that position his confidence that by taking refuge in God, “*I am saved from my enemies*”.

U. S. Army basic training teaches all recruits the power of a fortified defensive position through a course designed around the game “Capture the Flag”. A small group of 6 or 7 take up a superior position on higher ground surrounded by a wall and trenches (think of a moat) and are usually quite successful at preventing the remaining 30 or so soldiers in their platoon from removing them and taking the flag. A well-developed position can repel far superior forces, something witnessed historically when the 300 Spartans forced hundreds of thousands to face them in a very narrow gap they could defend and especially leverage their statistical disadvantage. The facilities listed in this passage of Scripture all share this feature as being more than capable of staving off even a numerically superior adversary.

We could almost end the lesson right here and convene a prayer meeting to corporately address our lack of ever doing anything like this at almost any point in the course of our many dealings with an antagonist. We so rarely retreat from confrontation and run to the Lord, but instead nearly always believe we are justified to protect and defend our self, especially if we are the completely innocent victim. Replacing our natural urge to instantly respond on our own and then instead learn to consistently incorporate God’s approach is admittedly a very difficult obstacle to overcome, to always defer to Him.

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Instead of calling out the attacker, David's first reaction is to "call upon the name of the LORD". Instead we seem to first and foremost universally adopt the world's axiom, "A good defense is a good offense", which is not expressed nor a concept in God's Word.

Throughout David's life it is obviously apparent that whenever he first pauses to "inquire of the LORD" and listens he is successful; when failing to do so he experiences disaster and tragedy. We first need to take ownership of the reality that the proper handling of conflict always begins by running **to** the Lord, not automatically believing we are justified to personally and immediately take unilateral action.

Even all levels of the military understand the need to check first with their chain of command who may have information of greater things about to come which are out of their local view, such as a large body of enemy reinforcements or an entire approaching army. Or even a greater effort that their own commanders are about to bring to bear on the situation. A single, local skirmish is not usually aware of the greater picture of what is taking place and about to appear from either direction; likewise, if for no other reason, we need God's perspective to properly navigate the situation. He sees the whole as it really is, and this may just be a local skirmish in the course of something much bigger taking place out of our view. The tactical viewpoint does not always trump the strategic situation. One of the soundest military strategies when uncertain or facing a bigger picture which will overwhelm is to run away. (The military prefers to call it a "tactical withdrawal".) In our case, we are always to first run to the Lord.

How Does God Take Notice & Respond?

*In my distress I called upon the LORD,
And cried to my God for help;
He heard my voice out of His temple.
And my cry for help before Him came into His ears.
— Psalm 18:6*

This is an astonishing detail not to be overlooked since there was no earthly temple in David's lifetime. This is therefore not speaking of the earthly facility to come in Jerusalem but its heavenly counterpart from which it would draw its design.

*For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, **a mere copy of the true one,** but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;
— Hebrews 9:24*

While both Testaments speak of the prayers of God's people in terms of an incense offering or as an aroma pleasing to God, the book of Revelation plainly reveals and depicts the throne of God as located in the heavenly Temple and worship and service taking place, including how the prayers of the saints gain access to God.

*When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**
— Revelation 5:8*

*And **the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints,** went up before God out of the angel's hand.
— Revelation 8:4*

At the very least, this shows the standards which God applies to prayer, which must be in compliance with the spiritual condition of those serving and worshiping in His presence. As a holy God, He requires holiness. Or as James would later write:

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The **effective prayer of a righteous man** can accomplish much.
— James 5:16*

James does not say **any** and **every** prayer of a righteous man, but “the **effective** prayer”, meaning that which aligns with the proper biblical parameters in both the prayer and the person. (Another whole lesson in itself.) But David’s spiritual standing factored greatly into God’s response.

There is no human figure found in Scripture who suffered calamity, tragedy, and dissension among his own family and friends, much less his enemies, than Job. And yet, consider how God viewed him going into his prolonged time of testing:

*There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was **blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.**
— Job 1:1*

Most biblical role models lived consistent, obedient lives conforming to God’s Word and ways in times of relative peace and therefore those qualities rose to the surface in times of trial, testing, and especially persecution. And even the most stalwart examples of right spiritual conduct all sought the Lord first before taking on an adversary personally. Later, in this same Psalm, it is these qualities to which David ascribes the Lord’s response to his situation:

*²⁰The LORD has rewarded me **according to my righteousness;**
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
²¹For **I have kept the ways** of the LORD,
And **have not wickedly departed** from my God.
²²For **all His ordinances** were before me,
And **I did not put away His statutes** from me.
²³I was also **blameless with Him,**
And **I kept myself from my iniquity.**
²⁴Therefore the LORD has recompensed me **according to my righteousness,**
According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyes.
— Psalm 18:20–24*

This second lesson, for which Scripture offers a wealth of parallel affirmations and reinforcement, is that our best preparation for times of conflict is personal faithfulness and obedience to God’s Word and ways in the course of daily life. We do not need to be learning how to deal with our own shortcomings in the midst of what is actually a major

spiritual battle when it is actually too late. (In that case we will learn a different lesson.) These should have been remedied during our normal, daily walk in Christ so as to be properly prepared in such times of crisis.

The Necessary Prior Training

***He trains** my hands for battle,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
— Psalm 18:34*

This segues into one of this Psalm's themes, that it is not our natural abilities or perceived gifting which will come to the fore of conflict, but by the biblical instruction and training from the Lord. The fancy term for this is our "sanctification".

But in verses 30-36, David not only lists all the ways in which God specifically prepared him beforehand...

- (v.32) "...God...girds me with strength..."
- (v.32) "...God...makes my way..."
- (v.33) "He makes my feet..."
- (v.33) "He...sets me..."
- (v.34) "...trains my hands..."
- (v.35) "...hand upholds me..."
- (v.35) "...makes me great".
- (v.36) "...enlarge my steps..."

...but integrates a list of the qualities of God which caused the successful outcome:

- (v.30) "...His way is blameless..."
- (v.30) "...the Word of the LORD is tried".
- (v.30) "...He is a shield..."
- (v.31) "...is God..."
- (v.32) "...makes my way blameless..."
- (v.35) "...Your right hand..."

All of this combines to show that there is far more going on than merely God coming to the rescue. His intervention also involves a greater spiritual working for **both** parties. He sees the opportunity for positive growth in the saint as well as the potential to address a serious spiritual shortfall in the antagonist.

We need to understand beforehand that God truly does have a plan for each life, and what seems like just an isolated event in our life is viewed by God in this greater context. He not only sees things as the progression of our life as the degree to which we are pursuing His will and calling, but also in the life of our provocateur. He is going to effect a solution which takes both sides into account, and that does not automatically require our involvement by the world's standards. He sees the path of our adversary's life and may choose to use us in an unconventional way to address those issues. It is not automatically an issue of justice where only one party is going to win. In both encounters between David and Saul, Saul actually repented! (1 Sam. 24:16; 26:21)

Have you ever noticed how there are far more categories in Scripture than just "sinner"? The additional designations of "wicked", "evil doer", "unrighteous", and so many others reveal that there are **many** different spiritual conditions which God does

not identically treat the same. Such individuals may be on varying points on those paths, some nearer to the impossibility of being turned around versus those who have only recently embarked on the wrong journey, and every point in between. It is likewise the same in His dealings with believers who may be backslidden, nominal, or excelling in the character of David or Job. Metaphorically speaking, one size does not fit all. It is only God, however, who clearly sees what **will** fit for each situation.

Seeking God's intervention is acknowledgement on our part that He works greater things even though we might see the situation as run-of-the-mill mundane. By running to the Lord, we are not just seeking for Him to give us a favorable outcome, but to become part of the spiritual process He will invoke to do something for the opposition as well as us personally. From a certain point of view, our taking personal action is just not a matter of unrestrained pride, but selfishness in that we are not seeking the spiritual remedy which God will provide for the opposition. God may require us to adopt an approach we would not ordinarily undertake so that it will act in concert with a greater process he is working within them. Scripture is replete with examples of this concept.

From Warrior to Worshiper

Psalm 18 ends with the victorious warrior for God becoming the deeper worshiper of God.

*⁴⁶The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
⁴⁷The God who executes vengeance for me,
And subdues peoples under me.
⁴⁸He delivers me from my enemies;
Surely You lift me above those who rise up against me;
You rescue me from the violent man.
⁴⁹Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O
LORD,
And I will sing praises to Your name.
⁵⁰He gives great deliverance to His king,
And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,
To David and his descendants forever.
— Psalm 18:46–50*

There is not even a hint of a reference in his conclusion to this psalm to suggest something was accomplished because of David's personal skill or strength; he attributes to God all the results of the victorious outcome.

How often, in the wake of a conflict, have we resolved it to our own satisfaction and **also** come away with the feeling of how amazing it was to witness God at work in both parties? More often than not, our best attempts have but delayed more and possibly greater conflict to come. We may believe God worked something on our behalf so as to experience what we think was success on His terms. In reality we did not run to the Lord but most likely ran out and engaged them, in our own mind sanctifying our actions by saying they were done in His name. For many of us, it never enters our thoughts that the proper response may involve waiting on the Lord and not even initially taking an active stance to oppose them. On this topic God's Word repeatedly teaches the need for self-examination **before** rushing to implement our instinctive, fleshly response.

*¹Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, **first take the log out of your own eye**, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*

— Matthew 7:1–5

Have you ever had the presence of mind to stop and honestly assess whether your antagonist's claims may in the least be even partially valid? Or before launching into our response, taken inventory of whether we are about to employ the same tactics offending us in the first place? When attacked, our first consideration should be that we respond in the right manner and within God's parameters not only as specified in Scripture generally, but at the Lord's direction for each individual situation locally.

But if there is still even the smallest lingering doubt that the proper process is to forego taking matters into our own hands and instead leaving it to God, observe the end results cited by David:

⁴⁶The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;

And exalted be the God of my salvation,

*⁴⁷The **God who executes vengeance for me**,*

*And **subdues peoples under me**.*

*⁴⁸**He delivers me from my enemies;***

*Surely **You lift me above those who rise up against me;***

***You rescue me** from the violent man.*

⁴⁹Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O

LORD,

And I will sing praises to Your name.

*⁵⁰**He gives great deliverance** to His king,*

And shows lovingkindness to His anointed,

To David and his descendants forever.

— Psalm 18:46–50

It is God who “executes vengeance”, “subdues peoples”, “delivers me”, “lift me”, “rescue me”, and “gives great deliverance”. Far too often, by acting on our own, we are attempting to accomplish what only God can transact for us. We couldn't come out of the old life without faith in Christ who enabled us to do so; neither can we deal with conflict on any level without submitting it by faith to Him and His management of the outcome.

In Conclusion

It is disturbing to see the many cyberspace examples of Christians responding in the same horrific way in which they were initially attacked. (Or worse yet, to initiate them in this manner.) Yes, the original antagonist was completely out of line from the outset, but a response in kind is just throwing gasoline on the fire and bringing us down to their level. Both parties lose the integrity of their personal witness and even sometimes incur serious damage to the name of Christ. They are really only effective among those who think and act like them and such spats seem to endlessly drag on. Where is the victory

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which transforms these warriors into avid worshippers? Where is the concern for what the Lord may be doing in the life of the opposition?

In trying to explain these things to a well-known public personality whose own followers surprisingly acknowledge his propensity to over-react and even return the same tactics and intensity of attacks conducted against him, I was plainly told, "You don't know what it's really like because it's not you they are attacking. I have my friends and family to consider." I have never suggested I am a well-known Internet figure, but 23 years of running Christian websites has certainly placed me in the crosshairs enough times to have personally experienced it. Most often I allow it to go unchallenged and leave it in the Lord's hands. (And my computer's trash can.) But I definitely examine over and over again whether I am even in the least way responding in kind before hitting that send button. In fact, I have deleted my responses before transmitting them far more often than the few on which I followed through. In fact, we hard coded the website to make it our [official policy](#):

"Response Policy

"There is no sufficient, purely scientific nor intellectual argument that will persuade a non-believer of the correct meaning of God's Word. Such devices are generally employed to divert attention away from the need to change the heart rather than the mind. Any person contacting us for the mere purpose of argument or harassment needs to be aware that our response will highlight your need to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. It's the only way you'll be able to understand how the Bible addresses every one of your arguments and issues.

"We take very seriously Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:6, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." This means we will respond with the Gospel and pray that God will soften your heart that you might accept a personal relationship with Him rather than engage in a debate. Understanding the Bible is not a test of knowledge but faith."

I suggest a good rule of thumb is an honest assessment of whether we are attempting to biblically exhort, rebuke, or console someone in the name of Christ rather than make a defense of our own name or possibly win an argument. Am I responding in order to merely address the accusations or seeking an opportunity to provide a spiritual change in my adversary? Such situations are actually an opportunity to allow the evidence of a changed life in Christ to be displayed to those who need to see Him far more than me regardless of whether they are a fellow Christian or enemy of the cross.

But if nothing else, consider some key biblical admonitions regarding the right Christian behavior in the course of conflict:

- *"But I say to you, **love your enemies** and **pray for those who persecute you**, (Matthew 5:44)*
- *See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but **always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people**. (1 Thessalonians 5:15)*

- *The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, **able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition**, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)*

And what if our detractor cannot be reached or turned around spiritually? What if the only thing left for them is a justified "nuclear option" in which they are dealt with in the severest possible way? It is still not up to us.

*Never take your own revenge, beloved, but **leave room for the wrath of God**, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.
— Romans 12:19*

The world's notion of conflict management would label someone taking such a course of action as weak or "chicken" because they failed to immediately defend their name and reputation by their own power. Scripture says to always retreat to a position where it can be addressed by the Lord's power in order to accomplish something greater where both parties are concerned. The Internet appears to be an opportunity to minister in the name and character of Christ we have largely squandered for our own name.

In Him,

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