

**MAKING PEACE IN THE FACE OF HOSTILITY**  
**By Rick Boxx**

Recently, I received a call from a former work colleague whom I had not heard from in years. He quickly launched into an angry tirade about an email I had written to others that he received when it was forwarded by someone. He misunderstood the facts I had presented in the email, resulting in anger and frustration on both our parts when he confronted me.

Even though I felt this man's emotional outburst was unjustified and out of line, I knew that we shared the same faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, since he was my brother in Christ, I needed to clear the air and seek to resolve the conflict. The fact that I had not done anything wrong, I concluded, was irrelevant. I set out to express my side of the situation, explaining how my peer had misinterpreted what I had stated in the email. After we discussed the miscommunication and apologies were exchanged, he and I were able to make peace and part on amicable terms.

This incident stayed in my mind for a while as I wondered how the problem could have been avoided before it started. All of us being imperfect individuals, unintended conflicts inevitably arise no matter how much we try to avoid them. Later, I sensed God reminding me of times during my childhood when my brother and I would fight, often over matters of little importance. I also remembered how our mother would wisely insist that we apologize and shake hands to restore our relationship.

As I have studied the Bible and its wisdom for the 21st century marketplace, I have discovered that one of its central themes is relationships – our relationship with God, and relationships we have with other people, whether at work, in our homes, or those we encounter over the course of a day. Here are a few of the principles the Scriptures provide about handling conflict:

**Forgiveness is not optional.** Our tendency is to think if the person who has wronged us seeks our forgiveness, we might grudgingly give it. And then again, we might not. But that is not the standard Jesus Christ set for His followers. He said, "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15).

**Disputes should be settled quickly.** If not promptly resolved, conflicts can fester and escalate into greater problems. In other words, turning the proverbial molehill into a towering mountain. It might not be possible to address issues immediately, but it does no good to avoid working through them and seeking resolution as soon as possible. "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26).

**Pride can be a big obstacle in resolving conflict.** A good rule to follow is that the relationship is more important than determining who is right and who is wrong. Having the humility to work toward forgiveness and reconciliation is an effective remedy for pride. "An offended brother is

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地址：香港上環禧利街2號東寧大廈20樓2004室 Tel: (852) 2805-1923

Email: [enquiry@cbmc.org.hk](mailto:enquiry@cbmc.org.hk) Web: [www.cbmc.org.hk](http://www.cbmc.org.hk)

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more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gate of a citadel” (Proverbs 18:19).

A wise person once made the observation, “We cannot keep birds from flying over our head, but we can keep them from building a nest in our hair.” In business, miscommunication can cause damaged feelings, but willingness to both offer and seek forgiveness can bring healing.

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a recent experience when a misunderstanding or miscommunication resulted in heated emotions between you and another person? How did you address that conflict? Do you think it was resolved properly?
2. What are your thoughts about initiating attempts to resolve a dispute with another individual, even when you feel certain that you were not the cause of the problem? How can pride present obstacles to conflict resolution?
3. How easy – or difficult – do you find it to forgive someone who has offended you or wronged you in some way?
4. Do you agree with the statement that relationships with other people are more important than the determination of who is right and who is wrong? Why or why not? Give an example if you can.

### Challenge For This Week

Sometime during the next week, consider how you typically respond when someone responds to you in anger. Being misunderstood, or having something we say misinterpreted can be hurtful, making us feel defensive. Are there any changes you might need to make?

If so, seek out a trusted friend, advisor or mentor and talk about how you might address conflicts with others more effectively, especially when they seem unjustified.

#### NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 14:29, 17:27, 20:3, 26:20-21, 29:11; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4; 2 Corinthians 2:9-11

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