

# Confronting without Offending

Deborah Smith Pegues



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## Contents

Acknowledgments .....	6
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### Part 1:

#### *Confrontation: The Bridge to Harmony*

1. The Goal of Confrontation .....	11
2. Commanded to Confront .....	19

### Part 2:

#### *Biblical Confrontation and Conflict Management Styles*

3. The Dictator: “Do It My Way” .....	29
4. The Accommodator: “Have It Your Way” .....	35
5. The Abdicator: “I’ll Run Away” .....	49
6. The Collaborator: “Let’s Find a Way” .....	57

### Part 3:

#### *Strategies for an Effective Confrontation*

7. Preparing for the Encounter .....	67
8. Owning the Problem .....	71
9. Speaking the Right Words .....	75
10. Listening .....	89
11. Negotiating Future Behavior .....	99
12. Releasing the Offender .....	107

### Part 4:

#### *Confrontation and Personality Temperaments*

13. The P.A.C.E. Personality Profile .....	127
14. Understanding the Temperaments .....	133

**Part 5:**

*Confrontation Guidelines for Selected Situations*

15. Family Interactions . . . . .	149
16. Marketplace Interactions . . . . .	155
17. Social and Other Interactions . . . . .	161
Epilogue . . . . .	171
 <b>Appendix 1:</b>	
P.A.C.E. Personality Profile Behavioral Summary . . . . .	173
 <b>Appendix 2:</b>	
Index to Biblical Conflicts . . . . .	177
 Endnotes . . . . .	179

Part I

# Confrontation: The Bridge to Harmony

## The Goal of Confrontation

I had it all planned. It wasn't a really big deal, but I knew that my husband, Darnell, would be pleasantly surprised when he saw how I had improved his workspace in our home office. He had talked about how inefficient it was for some time now.

Today wasn't the ideal time to break away from my writing schedule since my manuscript was due in a couple of days. But I had driven across town at the height of Los Angeles' rush hour to pick up a piece of custom glass that would complete the project. I had called his office and his cell phone several times to determine how much time I had to complete the surprise. He had not returned my calls. That was a little strange. He always calls back within minutes unless he's in a meeting.

I decided to call him on his cell phone when I knew for sure he would be en route home. Still no answer.

Now I was getting concerned. *Has there been an accident? Is he okay?* After what seemed an eternity, I heard him pull into the driveway. When I peeked out, I could see that he was talking on his cell phone. He proceeded to talk for another 45 minutes while remaining in the car.

Now I was getting angry! My imagination was running wild. *Why doesn't he come in and call the person on the house phone?* (After all, reception is very poor in our hilly area.) *Does he not want me to know who's on the call? Why hasn't he called me back in the last two hours?*

Well, he didn't have a clue that he was in such hot water. He finally came inside and explained that he had been talking to a close relative who was experiencing myriad distressing problems and that he had counseled and prayed with her. Yes, he had seen my calls pop up on his phone, but he couldn't find an opportune time to interrupt the conversation.

While I was familiar with and sympathetic to the situation, I was still upset. He had consciously put someone else's needs ahead of mine. That just doesn't happen in our household—almost 30 years of a good marriage attest (by the grace of God) to our having the right priorities toward each other. Teaching couples to put their spouses first—after God, of course—has been our soapbox.

"I'm supposed to be your top priority, and I could've been stranded somewhere," I said, trying to hide my anger and trying to employ the principles of conflict management I've taught over the past 30 years. Besides, I had planned the evening to allow only enough time to watch him be surprised with the office changes and to hear about his day and to tell him about mine—then back to writing. Now, I was more than an hour behind my schedule! He apologized profusely and was bewildered that I wasn't proud that he had invested so much time ministering to someone.

The next morning when we joined hands for our daily prayer of agreement, I prayed, "Lord, help me to release Darnell from this offense and to not allow a root of bitterness to form in me." When we finished praying, I said, "I was still smarting over that incident yesterday. I just wanted to pull the covers off Satan and expose his strategy to sow discord in our marriage."

After this confession, I felt our harmony was restored. Despite his hectic schedule that day, he called several times to show me that I was indeed his top priority. It became the joke of the day.

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Every offense has the potential to cause a  
permanent breach in a relationship.

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But strife is no laughing matter. Perhaps you've fantasized about a relationship environment in your life where everyone flowed in total harmony—completely free of offenses and interpersonal conflict. Wake up! You're dreaming. It's time to deal with Reality 101. Problems and conflict are a fact of life.

God did not create us to be carbon copies of each other. Therefore, in any relationship—whether personal, business, social, or spiritual—thorny issues will arise. Jesus told His disciples, “It is impossible that no offenses should come” (Luke 17:1). If you allow yourself to get stuck in an offense, your relationship with the offender can never be the same. John Bevere, in his book *The Bait of Satan*, says, “No matter what the scenario is, we can divide all offended people into two major categories: 1) those who have been treated unjustly or 2) those who *believe* they have been treated unjustly.”<sup>1</sup>

Every offense has the potential to cause a permanent breach in a relationship.

One of the meanings in the Greek for *offend* is “to entrap.” An offense is Satan's trap to deprive you of meaningful and productive relationships. When offenses come, someone must take action to close the breach. I believe, according to the Scriptures, that this is done through *effective confrontation*. That's why I'm writing this book—to give guidance on how to confront effectively.

Most people are avoiders, unwilling to confront at all. Those who do confront most often do so ineffectively. Laree Kiely, professor of business communications at the University of Southern California Business School, said, “The problem is people have never really learned how to communicate with each other in straightforward ways without doing damage to their relationships, or negotiating their relationships so both have some room to change or some room to stay exactly the way they are.”

In the following chapters I will show you how to use face-to-face confrontation to build a bridge between conflict and cooperation, between disharmony and harmony. Many shy away from it, but



confrontation can be a powerful tool for personal growth and relationship enhancement when done the right way.

Volumes have been written about teamwork and cooperation; however, most of us do not really understand the power of unity from a spiritual perspective. The Scriptures declare that God literally *commands* a blessing at the place of unity:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brethren to dwell together in unity!...  
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—  
Life forevermore.

(Psalm 133:1,3)

The attempt to build the Tower of Babel was a vivid demonstration of the power of unity. After the flood, God commanded the descendants of Noah to replenish the earth. Rather than disperse across the earth according to His mandate, they decided they would build a city and stay in one place. They also decided to build a skyscraper that would serve as a memorial to themselves. They were united in their objective, but God was obviously displeased with the project. Seeing the power and productivity of such a united effort, God knew that the sky was literally the limit for whatever they set their minds to do. He had to halt their progress.

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:5-9 NIV).

Yes, God was impressed with their unity in building the tower—though its purpose was contrary to His will.

Once the builders were unable to communicate, they were unable to continue building. The lesson here is pretty obvious: If you cannot communicate, you cannot build—anything. You cannot build a marriage; you cannot build a church; you cannot build a business.

Effective communication is the foundation of all human endeavors. Therefore, you must be diligent to keep the door of communication open even in the face of conflict. The apostle Paul cautioned us to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3 NIV). He also admonished, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).

The challenge is clear. Each of us must make it our priority and personal responsibility to stay in harmony with our fellowman. Harmony is not just about creating a pleasant environment; it produces synergy. The best way to explain synergy is to say that a hand is much more effective than five fingers working independently. I tested this theory one day using dumbbells. I wanted to determine the maximum number of pounds each of my fingers could lift independently. Two pounds was the limit. I then tested my capability with my fingers working together. I rationalized that five fingers times two pounds each should yield a maximum of ten pounds. Not so. I lifted thirty-five pounds!

This is the kind of synergy referred to in Deuteronomy 32:30 when it speaks of one chasing a thousand and two putting ten thousand to flight. Logically, if one can impact a thousand, then two should be able to impact only two thousand. But such is the result of unity—we are ten times more effective when we join together. It’s no wonder that Satan makes every attempt to keep us out of harmony. He knows that our unity will thwart his progress.

### **Confronting Versus Retaliating**

The word *confrontation*, like the word *diet*, has gotten a bad rap.

Most of us associate diet with weight loss, hunger, and giving up our favorite foods. However, a diet is simply any plan of eating. Some diets are designed for weight gain, complexion clearing, and a host of other positive objectives. They are all diets. And so it is with confrontation. To begin to change your mind-set about confrontation and to embrace the concepts that you will encounter in subsequent chapters, you must abandon any negative, preconceived ideas about confrontation and focus on the true definition of the word. The prefix *con* means “together” or “with,” and the root *fron* means “face; to stand or meet face-to-face.” Confrontation is simply *the act of coming together face-to-face to resolve an issue.*

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Confrontation is godly and is mandated by the  
Lord; retaliation is ungodly and thus forbidden.

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Many people want to know how my teaching on confrontation can be reconciled with Jesus’ teaching on turning the other cheek. Jesus was admonishing His disciples to resist the urge to retaliate when He said, “To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also” (Luke 6:29). There is a vast difference between confrontation and retaliation. To *retaliate* is “to return the punishment.” The Lord wants us to be so committed to not avenging a wrong that we would turn the other cheek.

Suppose you and another person you are in conflict with are sitting at a conference table and her foot keeps hitting your leg. She thinks she’s resting her feet against the table base and has no idea that she’s causing you discomfort and aggravation. To retaliate would be to kick her back; to confront would be to say, “You may not be aware of it, but you’re kicking my leg.”

Confrontation is godly and is mandated by the Lord; retaliation is ungodly and thus forbidden. Jesus admonished, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). In the context of this verse, to rebuke simply

means to tell him to stop. Jesus pulled no punches here; His words are clear and unequivocal. He wants us to deal with relational problems through effective confrontation.

## **“Confronting Without Retaliating” David Versus Saul**

David had every reason to retaliate against King Saul. Ever since David had killed Goliath, the insecure king had pursued him as if he were a fugitive from justice. The problem was that the people had literally sung David’s praises for defeating the giant, giving David credit for killing tens of thousands while ascribing only thousands to Saul. Saul reasoned that David’s next ambition would surely be to take his throne—and that the only way to stop him was to kill him. David was forced to flee for his life.

Accompanied by a band of brave supporters, David hid in caves and other places of refuge. One night while in hot pursuit of David, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. As fate would have it, David and his men were far back in the cave obscured from view. David crept up unnoticed and cut a piece off the king’s robe. David’s men urged him to kill his enemy, but David refused and would not allow the men to attack Saul. His conscience bothered him for even cutting the corner off the robe.

David passed up a prime opportunity to avenge himself against King Saul’s relentless pursuit. Although he resisted the temptation to *retaliate*, he chose to *confront* him.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He said to Saul, “Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the

LORD's anointed.' See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you" (1 Samuel 24:8-12 NIV).

Giving him the benefit of the doubt, David sincerely desired to know why King Saul had chosen to listen to those who told him that he meant him harm. Frankly, it was not others who had inspired the king to his dire actions, but his own deep insecurity (1 Samuel 18:6-9). In the true fashion of a man after God's own heart, David never lost respect for the king's position of authority.

This is a good example to emulate if we ever have to confront someone in authority over us at church, at work, or at home. We must continue to respect and honor the person's position while seeking to gain an understanding and resolution of the problem—even when those around us are encouraging us to do otherwise. We are never to adopt a vengeful attitude or to take steps to retaliate against an offender in an interpersonal conflict. The apostle Paul reminds us, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

### **Your Challenge**

If there is a conflict you need to confront, it's important that you have clarity on the purpose or desired outcome. Consider your true goal in confronting the problem. Do you wish someone to stop a negative behavior, start a positive behavior, or make other changes? Be clear on what you plan to request.