

Resolving Conflicts Across Cultures
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Description – The biblical mandate of becoming ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16-19) is examined within the complications of cross-cultural relationships. Following Patterson et al (*Crucial Conversations*), it is proposed that *dialogue* is the primary skill that leverages conflict towards healthy relationships. While cultural orientations are a source of conflict, the primary concern is to suggest effective approaches that can deal with any conflict within an intercultural setting. The importance of cultural sensitivity in stimulating constructive dialogue is emphasized as it relates to proven conflict resolution tools.

2 Cor 5:16-19 – ministry and message of reconciliation

Mt 5:9 – peacemakers: it is the children of God who do this.

- 1) If we are to be called children of God, we must be involved in reconciliation. We are not given the option to ignore tensions. It is not a virtue to let frictions in relationships alone; they need to be dealt with.
- 2) Conflicts are not an interruption to ministry, they are the ministry.
- 3) When we work cross-culturally, we open the door to exponentially greater opportunities for conflict, and therefore we need to manage conflict well.

Books / articles

Elmer, Duane. 1993. *Cross-cultural Conflict : building relationships for effective ministry*. Downers Grove: IVP. – Superb analysis and explanation of the *cultural* reasons for cross-cultural conflicts and considers how cultural biases develop that create conflict. Important disciplines introduced to facilitate healthy intercultural relationships and judgments.

Patterson, K. Grenny, J. McMillan, R. and Switzler A., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill 2002) – This book is neither about cross-cultural issues nor ministry. However, it provides essential tools for engaging people with positive and relationship building outcomes when opinions differ, stakes are high and emotions run strong.

Law, Eric H. F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (St. Louis: Chalice Press 1993). Deals with issues of High versus Low Power Distance and how to ensure appropriate cross-cultural dynamics in a decision making setting. Two key concepts are “languages of respect” and a methodology called “mutual invitation” that helps to overcome some of the barriers that create misattribution.

<http://impact.nbseminary.com/60-resolving-intercultural-tensions-1-power-distance/>

Cultural dynamics that create or exacerbate conflict

- 1) What gets people upset may be different / different values and priorities.
- 2) Peoples' responses to conflict are culturally shaped.
- 3) Methodology to resolve conflict is determined by cultural values.
- 4) Solutions may vary due to culture.

Tools for resolving conflict: Gracious Dialogue is the key.

- create *dialogue* in a *safe* environment.
- Avoid a fool's choice (violence or silence) by
 - o Learning to Look – what is really happening?
 - o Acknowledging your discomfort..
 - o Stepping out of the conversation
 - o Asking – do we need mutual purpose or mutual respect? Always deal with the latter first.
 - o Mastering your stories
 - Turn victims into actors.
 - Turn villains into humans.
 - Turn the helpless into the able.
 - o Looking for a third way
 - o Telling the rest of the story by seeking to hear their story– attend to the other in order to discover their grid / lens / value
 - o Finding a Cultural confidante
- Find the right Mediator.
- ABC

The power of knowing how to resolve conflict well:

Joshua example in Duane Elmer (p. 163, Chpt 11)