



PEACEMAKING AND ABUSE

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By Ken Sande

The peacemaking principles set forth in [*The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*](#) and its associated pamphlets and ebooklets, such as [*Transformed*](#) and [*Guiding People Through Conflict*](#), have been used to promote justice, peace and reconciliation in thousands of personal, business, legal and organizational conflicts.

As noted repeatedly in *The Peacemaker*, however, these principles must be applied with special wisdom and caution when dealing with situations involving serious sin, significant power imbalances or any kind of emotional, verbal, spiritual, physical or sexual abuse.

To begin with, churches must resist the temptation to deny and cover up incidents of abuse, which is often motivated by a desire to prevent scandal, protect someone's career or avoid the difficult and painful work required to bring healing in these situations. This kind of avoidance is extremely harmful to people who are being abused and contrary to God's Word, which commands us to confront sin and protect people from oppression (Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9; Mal. 3:5; Luke 4:18).

Conciliation in abuse cases must include victim-advocacy and restorative justice, and the methods and process must become intentionally "victim-sensitive." A "one size-fits all" conciliation model does not work when abuse dynamics are present and could re-traumatize victims.

Although it is normally wise to engage others gently and humbly when seeking to resolve personal differences (Gal. 6:1), it may be necessary to exhort, admonish, rebuke or formally discipline others when they seek to minimize their wrongs, shift blame or refuse to repent of serious sin (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Matt. 18:15-20; *The Peacemaker*, pp. 185-199).

Similarly, although flight is usually an unhealthy way to deal with conflict, there may be times when it is appropriate to withdraw from a confusing or emotional situation temporarily to calm down, pray, organize your thoughts and seek counsel and support. Flight is also a legitimate response in seriously threatening circumstances, such as cases of abuse (see 1 Sam. 19:9-10; *The Peacemaker*, pp.23-24).

God repeatedly calls us to imitate his forgiveness when others have wronged us. Even so, we must sometimes postpone granting complete forgiveness until the other person has convincingly demonstrated sincere repentance (see Luke 17:3; *The Peacemaker*, pp. 210-11).

It is normally appropriate to seek to resolve a personal conflict through a one-on-one conversation with the other party (see Matt. 18:15). However, it is neither wise nor prudent to attempt such a conversation when the other party has misused his or her power in the past and has not demonstrated sincere repentance. In such situations, it is entirely appropriate to forgo a one-on-one meeting and instead arrange for a trusted third party to participate in a meeting to prevent any manipulation or further abuse of power (see Matt. 18:16; *The Peacemaker*, pp. 185-199).

When an abused party has been mistreated so severely that she is fearful to be in the same room with the abuser, it is appropriate to postpone a meeting to allow time to provide trauma-based counseling to help her begin to heal, while simultaneously requiring the alleged abuser to participate in personal counseling to help him to sincerely face the seriousness of his behavior and be prepared to confess his own wrongs without excusing or minimizing his sins or shifting blame to the other party.

One of the most delicate issues in abuse cases is balancing the Judeo-Christian principle that people should be considered to be innocent until proven guilty against the equally important principle of taking allegations of abuse seriously and investigating them rigorously.

To put this in more personal terms, while I have seen all too many cases where a person in authority had misused that authority and caused harm to others, sometimes severe harm, I have also seen situations where allegations of abuse were greatly exaggerated or even entirely fabricated. Therefore, allegations of abuse should always be approached with great sensitivity, and neither party should be presumed to be either guilty or innocent until there has been a thorough effort to determine the truth. Sometimes, this will require an independent investigation and thorough counseling by well-trained and fully qualified professionals.

When the facts have been adequately investigated and both sides indicate a willingness to meet face-to-face, it is always wise to involve a trusted third party to guide the conversation and ensure that it is conducted in a way that is safe and constructive. Involving another person in a conflict is sometimes referred to as “mediation” or “Christian conciliation.” In many cases, conciliation can be carried out on an informal basis by someone who is known and respected by both parties, such as a pastor or leader in their church or a trained conciliator (see [Guiding People Through Conflict](#)).

Although such people can often be helpful when addressing normal sins and simple issues, they should recognize that mediating abuse situations requires special skills and training. For example, although it is normally good for both parties in a dispute to admit their own sins before focusing on the other person’s sins (Matt. 7:3-4; *The Peacemaker*, pp. 117-135), this principle does not apply in the same way when dealing with abuse. God holds people with power or authority to a higher standard of care (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:1-10), so an abuser’s sins are more grievous and must be dealt with

rigorously without allowing the abuser to minimize guilt or shift responsibility by misusing Matthew 7:3-4 to make his or her sins equivalent to others’.

Since abuse situations involve many potential risks and pitfalls, RW360 recommends that such situations be handled with the assistance of a conciliator who has received special training in applying the principles of Christian conciliation in cases that involve complex issues like abuse (see [Best Practices for Complex Conciliation Cases](#); [RW360 Directory of Conciliators](#) and [Christian Conciliation Service](#)).

With these thoughts in mind, I encourage church leaders to use the following resources to prepare and equip themselves to deal with serious conflict, oppression and incidents of abuse in a courageous, biblically faithful and redemptive manner.

- [A Better Way to Handle Abuse](#)
- [Best Practices for Complex Conciliation Cases](#)
- [Building Safeguards Against the Misuse of Power in the Church](#)
- [Abusers and Repentance](#) by Philip G. Monroe
- [Managing Power Imbalances and Abuse](#) by Daniel Teater
- [Is it Abuse?](#) By Darcy Strickland
- [Articles on Divorce and Abuse](#)
- [When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church](#) By Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson
- [Relational Commitments](#) (a tool churches can use to reduce exposure to legal liability while carrying out biblical pastoral care).
- [Beauty from Ashes](#), a ministry that specializes in addressing domestic abuse
- [RW360 Conciliation Hotline](#)
- [Building a Peace Sower Team](#) (a strategy for training key members of your church or ministry with peacemaking, coaching and conciliation skills that enable them to identify and confront abuse quickly and effectively).

These tools can go a long way to equipping a church to deal with abuse effectively. However, in many cases it is still wise to seek outside guidance from people who have training and experience with these types of cases (see [Christian Conciliation Service](#)).

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