

Understanding Conflict – Pursuing Peace

2 Samuel 2:16-3:1

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 7-22-2012

Introduction – The beginnings of the feud started in verses 12-16

Last week I made a brief allusion to the Hatfield and McCoy feud. Today I want to give you a little background to that conflict, because I think it is very relevant to understanding the dynamics of conflict going on this chapter. It was one of thirteen of America's bloodiest feuds on record. Some of the worst ones were in Texas. Everything's always bigger there, isn't it? But some of those feuds started with small things – a public quarrel that hurt someone's pride. One of the feuds started over a political bid to run against a local sheriff who had been in office for a long time. And his relatives and friends weren't too happy. Two feuds started because friends served on opposite sides of the civil war. Some say that's how the McCoy/Hatfield feud started. Others say that it was over an election quarrel, and still other historians say that it was an argument over a stray hog that had not been returned. And I think all those things kept adding fuel to the fire.

But let's begin at the beginning. Asa McCoy joined the Yankees to fight against the South. To the Hatfields, Asa might as well have stabbed a knife into each of their chests and turned the blade. Nobody knows for sure who killed Asa when he came back from the war. The leader of the Hatfield clan was sick in bed, so it couldn't have been him. But the suspicions are that it was a Hatfield who was part of the Wildcats. But the really tense times came thirteen years later when a hog strayed onto Hatfield property, and he kept it and claimed it was his own. When the issue was taken to court, Bill Staton, a relative of both families, lied in court, telling the court that he had seen that hog ear-marked by the Hatfields; it belonged to the Hatfields. This blatant perjury (and it was later shown to be quite blatant) before a judge who was a relative of the Hatfields, made two McCoys so mad that they hunted down and killed the witness. But there were lots of things that brought bad blood between them. For example, Roseanna McCoy began to court Johnse Hatfield on the sly, and Johnse later ditched the now pregnant Roseanna and married her cousin. You can imagine the anger that the McCoys felt over this slight. Immediately after that, during an Election Day dispute, Ellison Hatfield got into a fight with Roseanna's brothers, and ended up getting killed. Roseanna's brothers were then lynched by a

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Hatfield-led mob while in the custody of the law. Over the next eleven years the feud took many lives from both families, including a nighttime massacre of almost everyone sleeping in a McCoy cabin. It was brutal. Supposedly the feud died down after several men were tried in court and executed. But even though no more people died after 1901, the tensions continued to simmer. You see, feuds can exist without any bloodshed. In May of 1976 it finally ended, with Jim McCoy and Willis Hatfield, the last two survivors of the original families, shaking hands in a public ceremony dedicating a monument to six of the victims. So we are not talking about ancient history here. That was 1976. Jim McCoy died on February 11, 1984, at the age of 99. He said that he no longer bore any grudges, and to prove it, before he died he asked that his burial be handled by the Hatfield Funeral Home in Toler, Kentucky. So that's a remarkable end to almost a hundred years of two families despising each other. Isn't it amazing that bitterness can continue that long? But Hebrews 12:15 says that if we don't uproot bitterness out of our own hearts, that bitterness will poison us and spread to poison the hearts of those who are around us. It's just the nature of bitterness to do that. So even though it wasn't the worst of the American feuds, it is the most famous, and it illustrates some of the dynamics of conflict that we will be looking at today.

I. Emotional baggage (v. 16) can bring blind rage (v. 17a)

However, that classic American feud doesn't hold a candle to the hatred that existed between Israel and Judah. Last week we saw that the feud that began in this chapter produced inward resentment and grudges for 334 years – all the way up to the exile of northern Israel by the Assyrians. And we looked at one example of that simmering resentment. We saw that Shimei was still bitter over the events of this day twenty-eight years later. In chapter 16 Shimei sees David and his men escaping from Absalom, and he proceeds to throw dirt and stones at David and to yell insults and curses at David and calling him a bloody man because of this event - even though David hadn't even authorized it. There were obviously bad feelings that had been simmering under the surface for the past twenty-eight years. Time obviously does not heal all wounds. There was a demonic feud-spirit that kept the wounds festering and kept the grudges going.

And it started with the gruesome contest of verse 16 in which twenty-four men needlessly died. We looked at that last week, but I think you got a picture of how emotionally disturbing that scene was. If you were there, the emotion of that moment would have burned the memory into your soul. It was a ghastly scene as people were stabbing each other to death. And the

text says that at least Abner found it to be entertaining. That's the ghastliest part of this story. We saw last week that of all the interpretations, the most likely is that it was a gladiatorial competition for Abner's entertainment. But on any of the interpretations, it is clear that the Hebrew word for "compete" in verse 14 is literally to have fun, to have laughter, or to have pleasure. And some have suggested that Abner's cavalier attitude toward the lives of these twenty-four men is what made Asahel so angry that he made it his goal to kill Abner or die trying. Certainly the *battle* raged as a direct result of the twenty-four lives that had been sacrificed. The "So" in verse 17 would indicate a cause and effect relationship. **"So there was a very fierce battle that day..."** If there was one thing that verse 16 did, it galvanized Joab's men into doing everything they could to topple Abner. If anyone had tried to stop the war through diplomacy after verse 16, they probably would have been shouted down. There was too much emotion. And that's point number I - emotional baggage can lead people to blind rage just like it did with Shimei and just like it did with the men of that day. Neither Joab nor Abner were the kind of people who easily repented of bad actions they had taken. And yet, repentance and forgiveness alone can keep emotional baggage from being carried from generation to generation. If in your conflicts you keep finding the same ancient hurts coming up in your mind and flaring your emotions, and making you upset at somebody, that is an indicator of danger. If like Shimei, some emotional baggage can rouse your anger twenty-eight years, you've got some talking you need to do with the Lord. And we will see later that healing can only come through forgiveness and through the kinds of positive proactive actions that Romans 12 talks about.

II. People can be beaten and yet not be won (v. 17b)

A second principle can be seen in the second half of verse 17: **"and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David."** But did that settle anything? No. Chapter 3:1 says that they continued to fight for a long time. And elsewhere we find out that the "long time" was seven and a half years. Just as the contest in verse 16 did not settle anything in the minds of Abner's followers, being badly beaten in verse 17 did not settle who was right and who was wrong. When you have your own personal squabbles, you need to realize that coming up with all the best arguments and resoundingly winning and humiliating your opponent with your wit and wisdom does not necessarily win that person to the truth. You've beaten him, but you've not won him. David will use a completely different approach in the next chapter – an approach of conciliation. Joab will definitely continue to complicate matters, but David's methods were geared to lasting peace.

As I was reading summaries of the thirteen worst feuds in American history (hoping to find some sermon illustrations), I found it interesting that bringing one side into a civil court almost never settled the feud. It just made the people that lost the court case all the more angry. They thought that since justice was not done, “We’ll take things into our own hands.” Wars are not win-win situations. Court battles are not win-win situations. In fact, often both sides lose even if one side has technically won. They lose time, money, energy, and friends when they have gone through a protracted court battle. Everybody becomes the loser. Now, are wars sometimes necessary? Of course. Are court cases sometimes inevitable? Yes they are. But they should be a last resort. Even a church court should be a last resort. The emphasis in Scripture is on the first stages of Matthew 18 that do not involve the elders – that only involve you. And some of you might be the wise men and women that the book of Samuel later talks about, who are capable of winning people, not simply winning an argument. This was the function that Sam Houston took in the Regulator-Moderator feud in Texas that cost so many lives. He sought to understand what was driving both sides. He tried to understand the fears, the hurts, the grudges, and other issues that each side faced, and using wise diplomacy, he was able to negotiate a lasting peace. He would never have been able to force it. And David did much the same in upcoming chapters. But in family feuds and feuds between friends, there are no winners. Both sides usually end up losing something. And I’m going through these points because the more we can understand of the dynamics of conflict, the better we will be at peacemaking.

III. Certain people are more prone to perpetuating trouble (v. 18b)

A third principle that I see is that certain people are more prone to stirring up trouble than others. That’s a no-brainer, right? But we need to understand this principle if we are to make a realistic plan for peace. If David had been here, he might have been able to negotiate something that would have benefited both sides. He wasn’t always able to do that, but his heart was geared toward peacemaking. In Psalm 120:7 he said, “**I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.**” And because they were for war, he frequently had to fight, but David’s first instinct was to look for peaceful solutions. In stark contrast (and you will really see this later on in the book – in stark contrast), the first people mentioned in verse 18 almost always defaulted to the solution of cutting off people’s heads. And since the phrase, “**sons of Zeruiah**” later becomes a very negative phrase that is used any time that these men caused trouble for David, the wording of the second

half of verse 18 is quite deliberate. It is indicating that they were a part of the problem here. It says, “**Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel.**” These three brothers were David’s nephews. They were the sons of David’s sister, Zeruiah. And I think it mentions *her* name rather than the usual practice of mentioning the dad’s name because they were chips off of the old block – not of dad, but of mom. She must have been a piece of work. The way David later uses her name, she must have been quite the controversialist. In any case, these three were constantly bringing needless conflict.

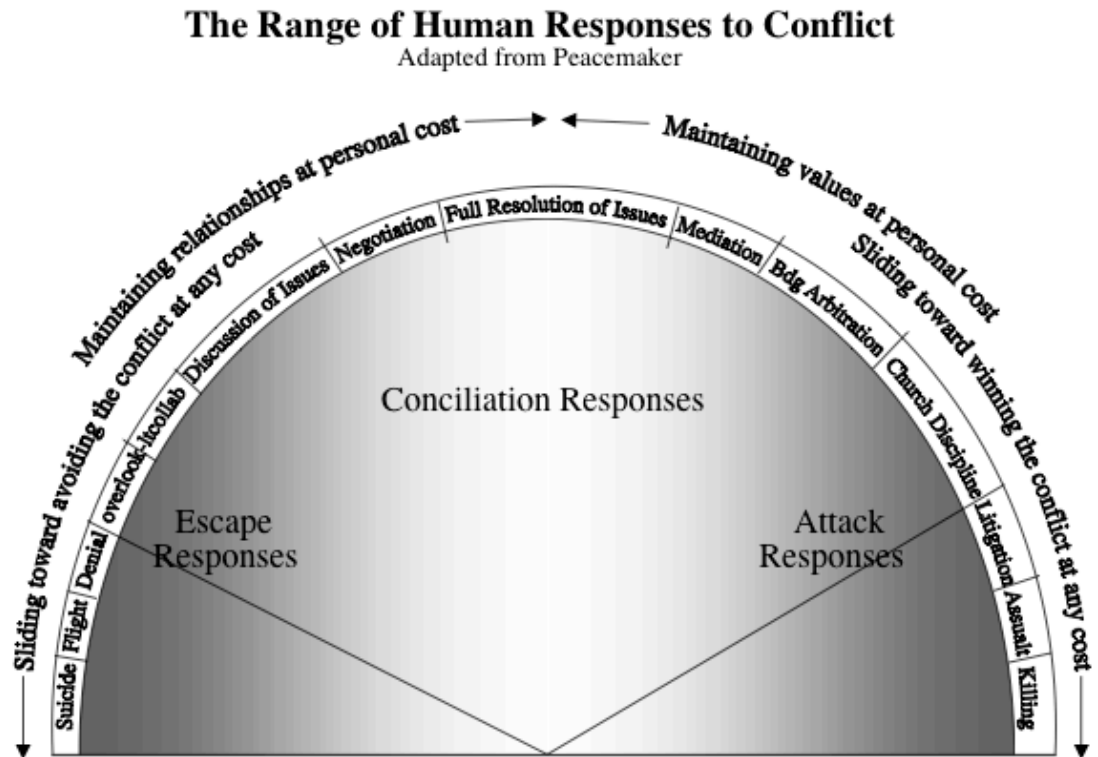
Take a look at the first chart in your outlines. I adapted this chart from Ken Sande’s book, *The Peacemaker*, and I made minor changes because killing (for example) is sometimes a necessity. It’s not always murder, as he labels it. But I want you to take a quick look at it, because I think this chart shows why David’s approaches tended to be better, and why David was so frustrated with his three nephews, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. If you look at the top line of rounded text with arrows pointing to the top middle of the diagram, you will see that the closer to the top of the chart you get, the more you are maintaining both relationships and values at personal cost. There is always a cost anywhere you go on this chart. So you are always trading one cost for another cost in the various ways that you resolve conflict. And I mention that because we tend to avoid costs (especially if we immediately recognize them) and think that doing the right thing is too costly. But we’ve got to constantly remind ourselves that no matter what we do, there is going to be a cost. But the top of the chart shows that at personal cost you are seeking to the best of your ability to maintain both the goal and the relationship in the conflict. And I believe David was a master at that. And we will see that especially in the upcoming chapters.

On the other hand, the closer to the bottom of the left side of the chart that you slide, the more you are avoiding conflict at any cost. Some people just clam up and/or flee or they roll over when they should be resisting. Some people hate conflict so much that they will not ever confront the sins of others that need to be confronted.

But the more you slide to the right hand of the chart, the more you are seeking to win the conflict at any cost – even the cost of the relationship. People who are always on that side of the chart end up losing most of their friends. Joab ended up a man all alone and very lonely.

There is always a cost no matter where on this chart you are at, and I urge you to take the cost that produces the most godly results. And be honest

on where you are at on this chart. Some people think that they are really trying to collaborate or negotiate, but they are really on the right hand side of verbal attack. Others think that they are peacemakers when in reality they are too far on the left side of the chart. They are rolling over when they should be confronting. But at least the chart helps you to see the full range of options.



It is obvious in this chapter and in the upcoming chapters, that the three sons of Zeruiah as well as Abner were quick to go to confrontation and to killing in order to settle almost any dispute. And I will use the illustration of Shimei. When Shimei was cursing David and throwing dirt at him in chapter 16, here's what Abishai says: **“Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!”** (2 Sam. 16:9). He was quick to use ugly insulting words (“this dead dog”). That’s a form of attack with the sword of his mouth. But he was also quick to use the literal sword. And David immediately responded, **“What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse...”** There is the peacemaker coming out. And notice that David doesn’t shy away from confrontation of sin. In order to avoid worse trouble, David has to spiritually confront Abishai. So being a peacemaker does not mean that you are a "dog who always rolls over." After David won the battle and came back to Jerusalem in chapter 19, Shimei begged forgiveness of David for throwing dirt and

rocks at him and for cursing him. And Abishai, who obviously was good at holding grudges said once again, “**Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD’S anointed?**” (2 Sam. 19:21). Even with the previous rebuke he wants to use the sword. He's obvious

Y upset with David for being too soft. He’s always over on the right hand side of the chart. And David shows his own peacemaking heart when he responds, “**What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I *am* king over Israel?**” He was saying, “You’re just like your mom in holding grudges. We can’t do that.” David refused to hold grudges because he knew that grudges cause trouble. By calling Abishai and Joab his adversaries he was saying, “Hey guys, you’re making it difficult for me.” Sometimes God’s people can make life more difficult for Christian leaders than the world. If your first impulse is to respond with ugly words or even to go on the attack, you have one of the elements that led to the disastrous feuds in America – feuds like that of the Hatfields and the McCoys. If you feel that urge to get even, ask God to show you a better way. And Romans 12 gives you a number of better ways that actually bring healing. But believe me, it will take swallowing your pride to do the homework that Paul gives in Romans 12.

If you are a son of Zeruiah, ask God to make you a peacemaker, and you can start by reading Ken Sande’s book, *The Peacemaker*. It’s a marvelous book. If you already *are* a peacemaker, you might want to factor into your planning not to let the sons of Zeruiah do all the talking in your negotiations. They will spoil the progress that you have made. Part of peacemaking is understanding where people are at on the war-peace continuum, and letting that knowledge guide your strategies.

IV. Asahel – a man swift of foot but not swift of mind (v. 18)

The second half of verse 18 introduces us to Asahel, a man who was swift of foot, but not too swift of mind. “**And Asahel was as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle.**” He must have been incredibly fast, because the Jewish historian Josephus tells us that he could outrun a horse. That is fast. In fact, I don’t know anybody that fast. And so this was a huge asset. But if you have not learned the inward self-control, patience, mercy, and kindness that David had to learn, your physical assets can actually get you into trouble, just like they got Asahel into trouble. Some people’s physical assets are their good looks. For others, it may be their ability to talk. They can talk people into the ground and win every argument. For others it may be physical strength, and

if they can't win an argument, they will get into a wrestling match. But our physical assets become liabilities if we do not bear them with godly Christian character. Everything, including our physical assets must be run through the cross of Christ. We must exercise them in light of the Gospel.

V. People can be too fixated on solving the problem (v. 19)

Point V says that some people can be too fixated on solving the problem. They can't stand the tension of having any i's undotted or any t's uncrossed or any problem unfixed. And they badger and badger and keep working on problems that really aren't theirs to fix. Verse 19 says, "**So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner.**" Though Asahel was fast, this young man was no match for a seasoned warrior like Abner. So pursuing Abner alone was really madness. There were plenty of other people that Asahel could have tackled, but he was fixated on one problem, and he would not let it go. He was like a bulldog. Once he locked on, that's all he could think about. And in personal conflicts, this can definitely be a problem. And you might be the person that needs to point that problem out to them - that they are like Asahel.

I have not witnessed this in literal wars, but I have certainly seen this in lesser wars – especially wars of words. I have seen people destroy their families and tear down their families by being fixated on an unwinnable issue that grates on them, and they won't leave it alone. They may not be warring with a sword, but they war with words, and nag and nag until there is an eruption where neither side wins. If you see it as your responsibility to fix everything in another person's life, they will perceive you as a relentless enemy, not as a friend. It is important to ask God which issues we should tackle, and which issues we should let love cover over, or perhaps let somebody else tackle.

VI. People can take on more than they bargained for (vv. 20-21)

Point VI gives the obvious observation that people can take on more than they had bargained for. Or, to use another expression, they bite off more than they can chew. Verses 20-21:

2Samuel 2:20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Are you Asahel?" He answered, "I am."

2Samuel 2:21 And Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him.

Abner gave one more warning after this, but Asahel wanted to pick a fight that was over his head. And in a similar fashion, there are Christians who pick fights with the IRS, or with some government agency, when everybody knows that they have no hope of winning. But they are relentless in fighting until they lose everything. I have a friend who lost his business, his house, his bank account, and finally he ended up losing his family, because of his insistence on not paying the IRS. On the charts, he was pursuing his goal of winning against the IRS at the loss of his relationships. Keep in mind that there is always a cost in resolving conflicts. You cannot escape the cost, but you can pick costs that better glorify God.

There are children who fight parents, or fight the system, knowing full well that they cannot win, but there is something in them that doesn't care. There is a defiance there that is self-destructive. I think it is often a demonic defiance. In one sense, you can admire the courage of some of the men in American feuds. But I really think it is a counterfeit of courage. Is it really courage to send a six-year-old child into a government school to be a missionary, or is that forcing the child to be an Asahel. More times than not it will be the school that will win the conflict of worldviews. Such a parent is giving his child more than he bargained for. This is not to say that God doesn't sometimes call a David to take on a Goliath. He does. But make sure it is God who is calling you, and not your pride, or your anger, or a thirst for revenge. This man took on more than he bargained for.

VII. Abner recognizes that this is a no-win situation (v. 22)

Point VII - Abner himself feels that he is in a no-win situation. Verse 22

2Samuel 2:22 So Abner said again to Asahel, “Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?”

Now, that last phrase is an interesting one: “**How then could I face your brother Joab?**” It shows that he had been holding open the possibility of working with Joab in the future. In his mind, at least one of the options that he was toying with was making an alliance with David, putting David on the throne, and working with Joab. But once he killed Asahel, Abner realized that that option would be closed forever and he would have no choice but to continue fighting indefinitely, even if it wasn't in his best interests. He knew Joab too well. Once Joab held a grudge, he never let it go. It's sad, but Abner recognized it.

So sadly, Asahel's fixation on killing Abner forced Abner's hand, and guaranteed that the feud would continue for another seven years. Neither side benefited. Abner's win over Asahel was a Pyrrhic win. A Pyrrhic win is a win that is so costly that the winner ends up worse off than before. Wasn't that the case here? The individual battle with Asahel was a Pyrrhic win that did not benefit Abner, and the battle of both armies became a Pyrrhic win for Joab, because of the enormous cost of fighting for seven and a half years. Abner had the ability to see the bigger picture, but he didn't have the character to avoid the fight in the first place. We need to be able to do both.

VIII. Even legitimate self-defense can guarantee continuing hatred (v. 23)

Point VIII deals with the dilemma that even legitimate self-defense can sometimes guarantee continuing hatred. We see it in several of America's most famous blood feuds, and we certainly see it in the planned revenge of Joab for what happened in verse 23. The text says,

2Samuel 2:23 However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was *that* as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

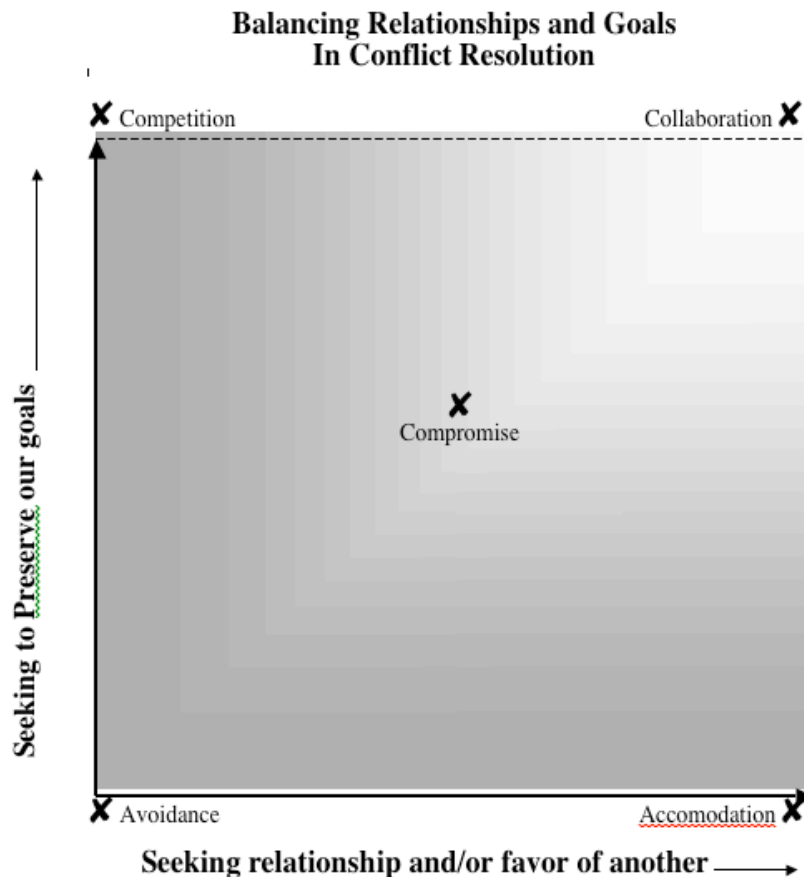
Knowing the potential fury of their general, people didn't quite know what to do next. So they just stopped at the sickening sight of Asahel on the ground. They stopped and waited for Joab. I think they had a sinking feeling that this was not going to be as short a war as they had hoped, and it kind of took the wind out of their sails.

Some commentators believe that Abner's use of the *blunt* end of the spear shows that he wasn't trying to kill Asahel. They think that this may have been an attempt to simply wound Asahel and knock the breath out of him. And that makes sense, given what I've already said. But the fact that the blunt end of the spear went all the way through Asahel's body speaks of either Abner's incredible power even in a backward thrust or of Asahel's speed in coming into the spear, or he didn't aim at the right spot, or a combination of all of those. But whether Abner intended to kill Asahel or not, this legitimate self-defense guaranteed the hatred of Joab and it guaranteed Abner's eventual death at the hands of Joab. And I think it is important to realize this – even legitimate self-defense can sometimes guarantee our doom. Now in this case, it looks like it was unavoidable. I don't think Abner had a choice (and in the next chapter, David didn't think that Abner had a choice). When it comes to protecting your life, you

sometimes don't have a choice but to blow your assailant away. But I like the fact that Abner at least tried to avoid killing Asahel to the best of his ability. And I think this passage illustrates how important it is to make such an act an absolute last resort. Too often people go on the attack simply because their pride has been hurt. The ability to swallow pride for the sake of peace is a sign of incredible strength. We will definitely see that in David's willingness to lose the argument to Shimei's verbal and physical abuse in chapter 16. It's a marvelous chapter on self-constraint. And I think that Abner showed some self-restraint. He didn't want to kill Asahel.

And I have included a second chart in your outlines that can help you to analyze the situations that you are in just like David did, and to some degree like Abner did. Just like the previous chart, this one has the dual concerns of seeking to preserve your goals and seeking to preserve a relationship. Those are the arrows on the left and the bottom. If you can achieve both, you are likely at the upper right hand corner of collaboration. Obviously collaboration takes more work than avoidance or accommodation, but it is the ideal. It's what David sought to practice in the next chapter. But there are times when the godly thing to do can be anywhere on this chart. It's just like the previous chart in that respect. For example, Christ commanded his disciples to flee from persecutors rather than allowing them to capture you and put you into prison. So that would be an avoidance factor – bottom, left corner. And if a relative demands that you choose between Christ and him, you don't have any choice but to choose Christ, do you? You should *try* to maintain the relationship, but there are situations where faithfulness to Christ means you will be on the upper left hand side labeled competition. But there are many more opportunities for legitimate compromise or collaboration than many people realize. And when I say "compromise," I don't mean compromising the Bible. I mean compromising your desires, swallowing your pride, and giving in to the concerns of the other person. We will see in upcoming chapters that David was willing to compromise his own feelings, desires, and privileges in order to win people (when possible). Romans 12:18 says, "**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**" And there will be times where we decide before God that winning an argument is not important in the overall scheme of things. We stop arguing even if the other person thinks he has won the argument. I know that galls some people, but it is worth it. But I guess the bottom line here is that even though Abner would not have been able to help it, even legitimate self-defense seemed to guarantee ongoing

hatred with Joab, though not with David. So if he could have avoided the conflict, he would have.



IX. Failing to finish what he started; conflict is inescapable in this sinful world (vv. 24-29)

Verse 24: **“Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner. And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which is before Giah by the road to the Wilderness of Gibeon.”** Once Joab and Abishai got to the place where everyone had stopped by the body of Asahel, they probably checked the body, and then Asahel’s brothers led the army in an attempt to catch Abner. I don’t in any way fault them for doing this. When you have an aggressor like Abner, the Bible allows for deep penetration into their territory. It would have saved a lot of lives in Korea if our government had taken the strategy of General Douglas MacArthur. It would have saved a lot of lives in Vietnam. It would have actually saved a lot of lives during the War Between the States if General Robert E. Lee had been allowed to invade Washington, DC after the Battle of Bull Run. The war would have been over, and proper negotiation could have resulted. And if Joab had

followed standard protocol and had finished Abner's army off and captured Abner, it would have saved enormous numbers of lives.

But here, for some reason, Joab responded with chivalry, believing Abner's sudden interest in brother not fighting brother. Verses 25-26:

2Samuel 2:25 Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit, and took their stand on top of a hill.

2Samuel 2:26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?"

Those are rather hypocritical words to come from the lips of Abner for three reasons: 1) First, he was the one who started the war; he was quite willing to fight brother against brother earlier; 2) second, he showed no care whatsoever about the twenty-four men who perished for his entertainment; that was pathetic; 3) and third, because we later discover that he had no plans on keeping to his side of the border in the future. But when he is losing he starts whining that brother shouldn't be fighting brother. Joab somehow believes Abner, rather than pressing for the advantage and a full surrender, which would have been legitimate during war. Verse 27:

2Samuel 2:27 And Joab said, "As God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren."

In other words, "We wouldn't have quit till morning. We would have kept fighting and mopped everything up." I'm sure Joab regretted many times that he didn't do so. I've often wondered if Jefferson Davis regretted micromanaging Lee. But in verse 28 Joab calls for a halt to hostilities.

2Samuel 2:28 So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore.

2Samuel 2:29 Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron; and they came to Mahanaim.

We soon discover that all Abner did was stop the fighting long enough to regroup and once again attack Judah. And it is sad but true that Christians will do much the same in their squabbles. In marriages there will be truces called, but because the dirt has just been swept under the rug temporarily and not truly dealt with, the war continues to drag on. So while the Davids of this world have to learn to be gracious and forgiving, they cannot be naïve. They cannot be doormats. Conflict is inescapable in this sinful world, and we ought not to shrink from conflict if God calls us to it. But it's got to be conflict on His terms, His ways, and for His reasons. And I think Ken

Sande's book, *The Peacemaker*, gives the Biblical parameters for godly conflict, and he does so brilliantly.

X. Without dealing with the root issue of rebellion against God (cf. 3:9-10), the truce was not a solution. The loss of life simply fueled the feud (vv. 30-31) on the part of Abner (3:1) and on the part of Joab (3:22-30)

The last point is simply the obvious observation that this truce solved nothing. And it solved nothing because the root issue of rebellion against God had never been dealt with in the heart of Abner. Abner knew that God had sworn to give the whole country to David. As I pointed out before, Abner was there when this was discussed with Saul and with Jonathan. He knew Jonathan's desires to make David king. He knew the prophecy of Samuel. He knew that David had been anointed. Even the Amalekite who brought Saul's crown to David knew that David was to be the next king. This was common knowledge. Look at Abner's threat against Ishbosheth in chapter 3, verses 9-11. He admits he had known it all along.

2Samuel 3:9 May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him—

2Samuel 3:10 to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.”

2Samuel 3:11 And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

Abner was one crafty fellow. He used Ishbosheth to give himself a powerful position, and now that the war looks impossible to win seven years later, he is using this argument with Ishbosheth as an excuse to trade sides. But the point that shouldn't be missed is that Abner knew all along that God had sworn to give the kingdom to David, and yet he fought against David anyway. Willful rebellion is hard to deal with in family, church, or state. It is often camouflaged as loyalty to God. But until the heart rebellion is dealt with, no one is safe from the threats of attack. The feuds within families; the feuds within churches almost always have some form of rebellion to God and rebellion to human authority at their root.

Anyway, let's read the remaining verses, beginning at verse 30:

2Samuel 2:30 So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel.

Nineteen plus Asahel is twenty. The amazing thing is that of the twenty who died from Joab's side, most of them (twelve) died because Joab

had agreed to Abner's stupid contest in verse 16. He didn't have to do that. The remaining eight is a pretty small number to lose, considering the losses of the Benjamites.

But there is bitterness over the loss of Asahel in Judah, and there is bitterness over the loss of so many in Benjamin. Verse 31:

2Samuel 2:31 But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner's men, three hundred and sixty men who died.

2Samuel 2:32 Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which *was in* Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.

2Samuel 3:1 Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

The deaths of that day simply fueled the willingness of the men to continue to fight. Feuds never settle anything; they exacerbate the problem. It wouldn't matter how many times David tried to put the feud to rest, Abner would stir it up. Let me emphasize again that this was a war of Northern Aggression. It was not started by David, nor was it agitated by David. Yet he was at war. And in the same way, it doesn't matter how godly you may be, as long as there are others who agitate and try to pick fights, you will have to learn to deal with conflict. Sometimes that will mean that you will have to fight. The Bible is OK with self-defense. Sometimes it will mean that you will try one of the other options on the two charts I have given to you. But in a sinful world, we must be skilled at conflict resolution. It's unavoidable.

And no matter where you are on those two charts – whether it is fleeing, fighting, or collaborating, or giving in, it is critically important that you not bear grudges or have inward bitterness like Joab did. And Scripture gives you the tools to not become bitter, even when people continue to do evil against you year after year. And on *that* issue, Joab and David are once again opposites. David refused to allow Abner to control his heart by getting bitter. And that's what happens when you get bitter against someone. That person is controlling your heart. Joab stewed and stewed throughout those seven years, and nursed the grudge, and planned revenge until the opportunity to kill Abner came along – and he ended up being guilty of murder. David on the other hand, was willing to take a risk with Abner in the next chapter. He risked the right hand of fellowship in order to have peace. And it was a risk, but it was a risk that David considered well worthwhile. He was a peacemaker. And peacemakers aren't wimps. If David were not such a good fighter, he would not have made such a good peacemaker. Even when it comes to national security, Deuteronomy says that when you are

fighting against an aggressor nation, you should arm yourself to the teeth, march to the city and declare peace to it. It's peace through armed strength. Otherwise that aggressor nation will walk all over you. Maybe that's why the Colt was called the Peacemaker. It's a Biblical concept.

Conclusion

Anyway, let me end by telling you the story behind one of the pictures in your outline. You've probably been wondering about it. It is the picture of the Door of Reconciliation. This door currently hangs on exhibit at St. Patrick's cathedral, in Dublin, Ireland. You will notice that the door has a rectangular hole hacked out in its center. And the story of that hole explains the Irish expression of "chancing one's arm."

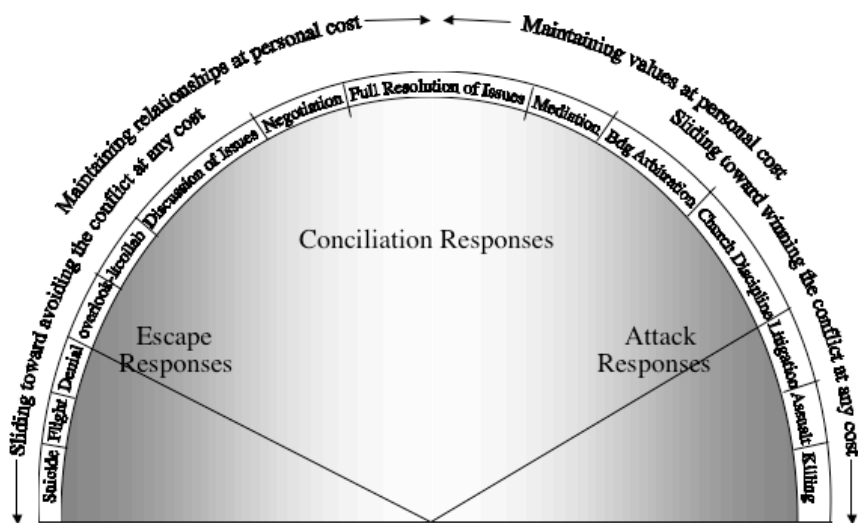
In 1492, two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and the Kildares, were embroiled in a bitter feud. Toward the end of the feud, the Earl of Ormand and his family were losing and they took refuge in the chapel of a cathedral and bolted themselves in. The Earl of Kildare laid siege to them to starve them out. However, as the siege wore on, the Earl of Kildare began to be convicted that the feuding was foolish and unchristian. Both families worshipped the same God and actually, they worshipped in the same church, and yet here they were trying to kill each other. So Kildare called out to the Earl of Ormand and pledged that he would not seek revenge – he wanted the Ormands to come out and for the feud to be over. But the Earl of Ormand was convinced that it was a scheme full of treachery and refused to come out of the chapel. So Kildare grabbed a weapon, and chopped a hole in the door with it, and thrust his arm through that hole. He didn't know if Ormand would cut his hand off, but he put his hand through the door offering a hand of fellowship. There was a tense moment until the hand was grasped by another hand inside the chapel. The door opened and the two men embraced, thus ending the family feud. And from Kildare's noble gesture of riskily putting his arm through the hole came the expression, "chancing one's arm."

Brothers and sisters: if you are in a feud with a fellow believer, I would urge you to do as David does in the next chapter, and to chance your arm. There is always the risk that it will metaphorically be cut off; the chance of more hurt, emotional wounding, and the risk of more grudges. But if Christians don't chance the arm in reaching out to each other, the senseless and joyless feuds will continue to eat away at both of you just like this feud continued to cause death and suffering in chapter 3:1. Don't be naïve (I'm not calling you to be naïve), but say "No" to feuds and say "Yes"

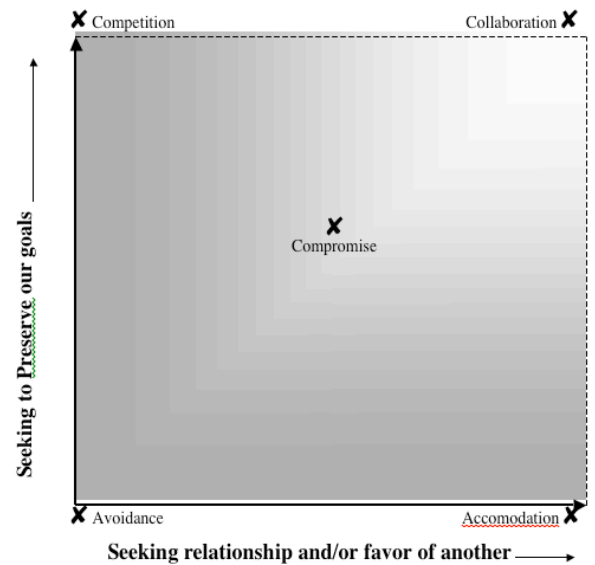
to any *realistic* opportunities for peacemaking that God might afford. And may God bless and prosper your efforts at resolving conflicts. Amen.

The Range of Human Responses to Conflict

Adapted from Peacemaker



Balancing Relationships and Goals In Conflict Resolution



Understanding Conflict – Pursuing Peace 2 Samuel 2:16-3:1

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 7-22-2012

Introduction – The beginnings of the feud started in verses 12-16

- I. Emotional baggage (v. 16) can bring blind rage (v. 17a)
- II. People can be beaten and yet not be won (v. 17b)
- III. Certain people are more prone to perpetuating trouble (v. 18b)
- IV. Asahel – a man swift of foot but not swift of mind (v. 18)
- V. People can be too fixated on solving the problem (v. 19)
- VI. People can take on more than they bargained for (vv. 20-21)
- VII. Abner recognizes that this is a no-win situation (v. 22)
- VIII. Even legitimate self-defense can guarantee continuing hatred (v. 23)
- IX. Failing to finish what he started; conflict is inescapable in this sinful world (vv. 24-29)
- X. Without dealing with the root issue of rebellion against God (cf. 3:9-10), the truce was not a solution. The loss of life simply fueled the feud (vv. 30-31) on the part of Abner (3:1) and on the part of Joab (3:22-30)

Conclusion

