

The logo features the words "CONFLICT" and "RESOLUTION" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. "CONFLICT" is positioned above "RESOLUTION". The text is centered within a dark red, diamond-shaped graphic that has a textured, almost crystalline appearance. The background of the entire image is black.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

II. CHARACTERISTIC DYSFUNCTIONAL WAYS OF HANDLING CONFLICT

It was a classic case of sibling rivalry, except that it originated in the womb. Rebekah sensed more than just the random kicking of tiny feet within her, there was a real struggle going on. The Lord explained, *“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger”* (Genesis 25:23).

On the day of the twins’ birth, Esau arrived first, reddish and covered with hair. Jacob quickly followed, his hand holding his brother’s heel, a foretelling image of the position he would usurp from his brother. The name, Jacob, means “He takes by the heel” or “He cheats.”

The two brothers could not have been more different. Esau was a masterful hunter, the proverbial outdoorsman, while Jacob was reserved, preferring to remain indoors and cook. Esau was brash and brazen; Jacob was cool and calculating, as evidenced by the red stew incident when Esau, exhausted from a day of working in the field, wanted some of what Jacob had boiling in a pot. His brother obliged him, but only after buying Esau’s birthright (Genesis 25:31).

Jacob later deceived his aging father, Isaac, by claiming to be Esau and thereby obtained the sought-after blessing of the firstborn. This deception prompted threats of murder from his brother, Esau.

A. What Are Common Statements Used in Conflict?

Conflict—it happens to the best of us. Two of God’s premier workers in the early days of the church, Paul and Barnabas, had “a sharp disagreement” (Acts 15:39) that resulted in their going their separate ways. The cause for contention was that Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark with him and Paul as they revisited cities where they had ministered.

Paul disagreed, mindful of John Mark’s deserting them on a previous mission trip. John Mark had obviously regained the trust of Barnabas, but not of Paul. Their differences were resolved by the launching of two missionary journeys instead of one with Barnabas and his cousin going to Cyprus and with Paul and Silas going to Syria and Cilicia.

*“I appeal to you ... that all of you agree with one another.”
(1 Corinthians 1:10)*

Who Are Attackers/Who Are Avoiders?

- ***Seven Faulty Accusations of Attackers***
 - “You’ll never change.”
 - “You are always against me.”
 - “You will reject me—it’s just a matter of time.”
 - “You can never be trusted.”
 - “You’ve failed too much—you are a failure.”
 - “You are hopeless—there’s no hope for you.”
 - “You are totally at fault if this relationship fails.”
- ***Seven Faulty Expectations of Avoiders***
 - “You should never create conflict in our relationship.”
 - “You will always see things my way if you truly love me.”
 - “You will always do things my way if you are loyal to me.”
 - “You must never get angry with me because I will not be able to handle it.”
 - “You must look only to me to meet all of your needs.”
 - “You are to look only to me to make you happy.”
 - “You will always need me to make you secure.”

B. What Do Attackers and Avoiders Look Like?

Each of us begins to develop a style of handling conflict at an early age. Our personal ways of “fighting” come from our natural instinct, personality, and early family dynamics. Many of us are unable to defuse conflict because we are repeating the extreme patterns of childhood ... either *attacking* or *avoiding*. Those in these two different categories can be thought of as either *attackers* or *avoiders*. Considering the characteristics of the six “critters” mentioned earlier will help define the personalities of the two categories. The problem with both of these styles is that neither strategy appropriates the grace that is available to a child of God.

*“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
(Hebrews 12:15)*

Attackers ... Outwardly Aggressive

#1 *The Wolf* alias *Dictator*

(a person granted absolute power, holding complete autocratic control)

- Seeks to control everyone and everything
- Judges the actions and motives of others
- Refuses to listen to opposing opinions with an open mind
- Uses criticism to cut people down
- Engages in power plays

Message: “Give in to me or I’ll attack you!”

Goal: To feel powerful

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” (Matthew 7:15)

#2 *The Snake* alias *Backbiter*

(a person who says mean or spiteful things behind another person’s back)

- Bites when you’re not looking
- Uses criticism and “put-downs”
- Starts false rumors
- Pretends to have done nothing wrong
- Gathers allies

Message: “Don’t tangle with me or you will regret it later.”

Goal: To feel superior

“You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34)

#3 The Hornet alias **Faultfinder**

(a person who is disposed to find fault, is critical, petty, and nagging)

- Registers repetitive complaints
- Makes negative statements about everything
- Blames others
- Pulls others into disagreements
- Delights in misery

Message: “Don’t get on my bad side or I’ll talk about you!”

Goal: To feel valuable

“A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul.” (Proverbs 18:7)

Avoiders ... Inwardly Passive

#1 The Turtle alias **Retreater**

(a person who withdraws from what is difficult, dangerous, or disagreeable)

- Plays dumb
- Gives one-word answers
- Withdraws
- Seeks secrecy
- Makes you feel guilty for asking questions

Message: “Don’t confront me because it won’t do any good.”

Goal: To feel safe

“A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful.” (Proverbs 14:25)

#2 The Chameleon alias **Obliger**

(a person who is bound in some way to another or is in someone's debt for a favor or service)

- Avoids making decisions
- Acts innocent
- Appears nice and agreeable
- Recoils from making a commitment
- Downplays differences

Message: "I'm nice to you; you owe it to me to be nice back."

Goal: To feel accepted

"Fear of man will prove to be a snare." (Proverbs 29:25)

#3 *The Weasel* alias *Twister*

(a person who perverts meanings, squirms, is devious, and uses gimmicks)

- Uses clever defensives
- Sidesteps the issue
- Twists and bends the truth
- Blames others
- Avoids "I" statements

Message: "I'm not going to get pinned down."

Goal: To feel confident

"A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble." (Proverbs 17:20)

C. Who Displays Which Style of Conflict in Scripture?

Based on the thousands of narratives throughout the Bible, even the novice reader sees that negative conflict has been "alive and well" from the beginning of time. For example, Abraham, on two different occasions, lies about his relationship with Sarah, his wife—he passes her off as his sister. Because of her beauty, he fears that both monarchs will kill him in order to take her. Because of his fear, Abraham acts like a turtle, hiding in its shell.

A different kind of avoider is Abraham's grandson Jacob. He wants the birthright due his older twin brother. Instead of telling the truth, deceitful Jacob

lies, connives, and weasels his way into his father's presence and blessing. Jacob is a weasel of the first order!

Which type of *attacker* or *avoider* is each of the following people? (At times, a person may not be in conflict, but then later a major conflict flames.) Analyze and identify the negative conflict styles in each of the following relationships. (Hint: **Read the Scripture first.** Then fill in the blanks.)

- **Relationship #1—Between The Serpent, Adam, and Eve**

The Serpent: *He is an attacker, a snake.... He plays the part of himself!*

"The serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman [Eve], 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?' " (Genesis 3:1)

Adam: *He is an avoider, a weasel.... He tried to weasel out of accepting responsibility for his wrong choices by blaming Eve!*

"The man [Adam] said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.' " (Genesis 3:12)

Eve:

"Then the Lord God said to the woman [Eve], 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.' " (Genesis 3:13)

- **Relationship #2—Cain toward Abel**

Cain:

"Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." (Genesis 4:8)

- **Relationship #3—Between the Philistines, Delilah, and Samson**

The Philistines:

"The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, 'See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver.' " (Judges 16:5)

Delilah:

"She said to him, 'How can you say, "I love you," when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength.' With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death." (Judges 16:15–16)

Samson:

“So he told her everything. ‘No razor has ever been used on my head,’ he said, ‘because I have been a Nazirite set apart to God since birth. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.’ ” (Judges 16:17)

- **Relationship #4—King Saul toward David**

King Saul:

“He [Saul] raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, ‘I will pin David to the wall.’ But David evaded him twice.” (1 Samuel 18:10–11 ESV)

- **Relationship #5—King David toward Bathsheba**

King David:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says.... ‘Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’ ” (2 Samuel 12:7, 9–10)

- **Relationship #6—The Pharisees toward Jesus**

Pharisees:

“Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples.... ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.... You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?’ ” (Matthew 23:1, 13, 33)

- **Relationship #7—Pilate toward Jesus**

Pilate:

“On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.” (Luke 23:6–7)

- **Relationship #8—Judas toward Jesus**

Judas:

“Judas Iscariot ... asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.” (Matthew 26:14–15)

- **Relationship #9—Martha toward Jesus**

Martha:

“Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’ ” (Luke 10:40)

- **Relationship #10—Peter toward Jesus**

Peter:

“Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee,’ she said. But he denied it before them all. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.’ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed.” (Matthew 26:69–74)

(Note: If you are still stumped, the answers can be found at the very end of this set of Keys.)

Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Conflict Resolution: Solving Your People Problems* (pp. 9–14). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.