



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Conflict

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RESOLVING CONFLICT

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Galatians 6:1

When Jo Shetler went to work among the Balangao people, a tribal group in Northern Luzon in the Philippines, she quickly learned that the way she did things was much different from the way they were done in the tribe. She knew, of course, there were cultural differences. But what she didn't understand was how great they were. She soon learned that though the Balangaos didn't have the advancements of culture and civilization that she had grown up with, they had far, far surpassed her culture when it came to interpersonal relationships, especially getting along with difficult people.

In her book, *And The Word Came with Power*, Jo tells about the time when an individual came into the area with teaching which contradicted the biblical message she was trying to communicate. Her first reaction was to ask one of the tribal leaders to put a stop to this. When she pressed her adopted father in the tribe to do something, he replied, "My child, you just don't know how to discuss things with others."

At those words, Jo was rebuffed. Then she said, "Well, you're my father. I guess you'd better teach me." So the old man sat down with her and explained how to deal with conflict. "First of all," he said, "you must listen." Then he said, "Walk along with the other person on his trail and affirm every point you can, demonstrating to him that you understand him. Then, when he's no longer threatened, and he realizes you understand his argument, take him by the hand and lead him where you want him to go."

And those words of counsel came from a man who never darkened the door of a school or listened to a concert of the world's great music.

Little did this man, considered primitive by many, realize he was paraphrasing what St. Thomas Aquinas wrote centuries before. Aquinas, who knew more than almost anybody who ever lived about persuasion, once wrote that "when you want to convert someone to your view, you go over to where he is standing, take him by the hand (mentally speaking), and guide him. You don't stand across the room and shout at him; you don't call him a dummy; you don't order him to come over to where you are. You start where he is and work from that position. That's the only way to get him to budge."

Let's analyze what that Balangao brother said. In resolving conflict, first listen to what the person with whom you have a disagreement is really saying. Don't judge the person before you really understand. Possibly your conflict is a matter of terms--not substance. Then--step two--try to meet the person on common ground. What do you have in common? What are your areas of agreement? Start from there. Then, if possible, gain the confidence of the individual with whom you have conflict. Sometimes when there is conflict--whether it is in a marriage or in a friendship--we come on so strongly that any attempt to point out the error of a person's way is considered a hostile rebuff.

Finally, suggested this wise brother, "take him by the hand and lead him where you want him to go." He understood the spirit of what Paul wrote, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3). Without moralizing, strive to put these simple steps to work when you have conflict with someone. They will work for you as well.

Resource reading: Galatians 6:1-10