

Sermon

Grace Street Fellowship, Dr. Jim Burgin, pastor
Sunday, July 15th, 2018 - "How to Resolve Conflict"
Romans 12: 17 & 18, Matthew 5:23-24

SCRIPTURES

1. Romans 12: 18 (NIV) – “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
2. Matthew 5: 23-24 – Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

OPENING

1. Illustration – My family grew up in South Korea. When I was 16, I crossed John Linton, the black belt on the volleyball team. He made me feel like he was going to beat me up, and it was scary. He didn't know how to resolve conflict. The situation between John and I wasn't easy to resolve.
2. Infected by sources we can't always see
 - a. In a Christianity today article a while back, pastor Ed Rowell told a story from his childhood. His neighbors came down with a devastating illness. Several of the children died, and the rest suffered permanent brain damage. What investigators discovered was that the father had found a truckload of discarded seed corn and fed it to the family hogs. The corn wasn't intended for animal feed and had been treated with something so bugs would eat it before it germinated. The hogs ate it, seemingly with no ill effects.¹
 - b. But when the family hogs became the family breakfast, the family was poisoned. It seems that many substances – pesticides and heavy metals like lead and mercury – do not pass through the digestive system, but remain in the body always. In tiny doses, the effects are minimal. But over time, the effects are horrible.
 - c. This is what I believe happens to many of us in life. Every day we ingest minute amounts of conflict and disrespect. No big deal, we think. Just blow it off. But we don't. Instead it gets buried in our liver and 20 years later, we go ballistic over some kid skateboarding in the parking lot and wonder “Where did that come from?”
3. Conflict is all around us
 - a. Home, family, school, work, at the park, at city hall, in the government, between countries – everywhere we look there seems to be conflict. There is conflict in every area and every segment of our society today.
 - b. Conflict affects all of us – You can be rich, popular, or talented, but if your relationships are conflict-filled, then you will be miserable. They will suck the life right out of you.
 - c. We can see that conflict is the very air we breathe just by reading the captions on news stories. (1) Fox News Yesterday – “Embarrassing London mayor **slammed** for Trump fed while city faces rising crime.”² (2) Huffpost – “**Crushed** by HR: A ‘Me Too’ Tragedy. (3)

¹Ed Rowell, “Why Am I Angrier Than I Used to be? Christianity Today Pastors (Summer 2000)

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2000/summer/12.78.html>. Accessed Saturday, July 14th, 2018.

² Fox News Online “Critics slam ‘embarrassing’ Mayor Sadiq Khan for feuding with Trump while London faces rising crime, knife deaths. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/07/14/critics-slam-embarrassing-mayor-sadiq-khan-for-feuding-with-trump-while-london-faces-rising-crime-knife-deaths.html>. Accessed Saturday, July 14th, 2018.

Wendell Griffin, Judge, author, and Baptist pastor in Arkansas writes this week that “The Dominant Religion of the United States is White Supremacy.”³

- d. Since we have so much conflict around us, it is important that we understand how to handle conflict – to have the peace we need; to be the peacemakers we are called to be.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

1. Unresolved conflict blocks my fellowship with the Lord.
 - a. First, it sucks the life out of you, draining you of time and energy to be in a relationship with the Lord.
 - b. More than that, though, when I am in conflict with someone, I can’t be in harmony with God.
 - c. 1 John 4: 20 says “the person who says I love God and hates his neighbor is a liar.”
 - d. Matthew 22:37-39 says that we are to “love the Lord with all our heart” and “to love our neighbor as ourselves.
2. Unresolved Conflict Hinders Happiness – How is it possible to be in conflict and to be happy at the same time? When conflict comes in the front door, happiness exits the back door.

A DIFFERENT OPERATING SYSTEM

1. Have you weighed in on the “epic battle” of the PC vs. MAC debates? If we were to take a poll, it would be interesting to know how many of us love the MAC, and how many think the PC is best. What’s different about a MAC? They live in the same world, and produce much of the same products, but their operating systems are completely different.
2. Our scripture for this morning teaches us “**not to repay evil for evil.**” We are to “**do what is right in the eyes of everyone.**”
3. So, for Christians, our operating system is different. The world operates by Power. We operate with love. So, Paul reminds us that we are not to return power for power, to fight fire with fire, but to return good for evil. When they push our buttons, we are not to push their buttons back.

AS MUCH AS LIES WITHIN YOU

1. The Lord Values Our Effort- especially when we really try to do it right
2. We can’t Control the Outcome – Our job is to be faithful, not to fix or to control. We stay in our lane, and He stays in His.
3. Conflict Resolution Takes Two – You can do your part, but you can’t make the other person come to the table. You can’t make the other person or persons see the truth as you know it. Sometimes, no matter your best efforts, conflict continues. No matter how hard you try with some people, they are impossible to satisfy.

³ Wendell Griffen Blog “The Dominant Religion of the United States is White Supremacy.” July 11th, 2018. <http://wendellgriffen.blogspot.com/2018/07/the-dominant-religion-of-united-states.html>. Accessed Saturday, July 14th, 2018.

IF IT IS POSSIBLE

1. A Patient Word – Peace in relationships isn't always possible, because we fall short, and he knows our shortcomings. This isn't a license to stay in conflict, but a clarification & an encouragement from the Lord that the roots of conflict go deep, and are often difficult to discern.
2. A Merciful Word – This is also a graceful gift – when we don't come to resolve in relationships, that God knows our hearts, hears our cries, and cares very much about the process. When you have children learning to walk, they are going to stumble on their way to success. Wise, loving parents encourage them as they grow.

BE AT PEACE WITH ALL MEN

1. Some People Aren't Peaceable
 - a. *Some people create drama* – wherever they go. They are the opposite of peaceable.
 - b. Self-Centered people create dissonance – Psychology Today talks about five kinds of High-Conflict people & what to do:⁴
 - i. **YELLERS** – The yeller uses voice volume to control and intimidate others. If you say, “Please lower your voice,” they often respond, “This isn't yelling.” I'll show you what real yelling is.” A peacemaker, will recognize the fear in a yeller, then in a quiet moment, will ask them “What do you need from me?” If that doesn't work, then they will leave when the yelling starts as a way to minimize peace.
 - ii. **THE WALL** – People stonewall, or cut people out, turning their back when someone they don't like walks into a room. They shut you out of their life. A peacemaker will express love to this person and give them space, but also stop chasing them down with texts, emails, calls. Sometimes people are silent, so that they can control.
 - iii. **THE SNEAK** – A sneak loves to incite conflict between others, often through gossip, or partial truth. “You know what so & so said? But you didn't hear it from me. A peacemaker can say “I don't like talking about people when they aren't here, and then change the subject or walk away. A peacemaker never gives the sneak information. They are information vampires – Remember, that if they are talking about someone else to you, then they are talking about you to someone else.
2. Being at Peace Doesn't Mean:
 - a. Pleasing Everyone - You can't do that. A peaceable person puts God's approval above the approval of men. Remember, when Martha and Mary needed Jesus to come and heal Lazarus, but he delayed for two days? Remember, when Pilate asked Jesus if he knew that Pilate had the power to execute or to free him? Jesus replied, only God has that power. Wow. Then Pilate betrayed himself by keeping the peace, and giving Jesus over to the crowd, because he wasn't strong enough
 - b. Avoidance of Conflict at all costs– some people want peace at any cost, because conflict makes them nervous or uncomfortable, so they will settle for any solution, even an inequitable or unjust one in order to keep things calm.
 - i. Manipulation and control generally is a part of the equation.
 - ii. Or, through letting yourself be run over.

⁴ Psychology Today – “The 5 Types of High-Conflict People & What To Do” November 22, 2016.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201611/the-5-types-high-conflict-people-what-do>. Accessed July 14th, 2018.

3. Being at Peace Does Mean

- a. We are Connected to the God of Peace – “blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” When Jesus was born, the angels pronounced good tidings, and on earth, peace and good will to men.
- b. We Care about everyone equally – not just our family or tribe, not just those who can contribute to our well-being; Peace with all men.
- c. We protecting the weak & vulnerable & speak truth to power when necessary –
 - i. Writing for the Washington Post, journalist Carlos Lozada says that in our era truth “is not dead, but it is degraded.” Those in power often control the narrative in a way that shapes the truth to their perspective. Others, he says, simply subordinate the reality to meet their own personal ambition or need.⁵ We must be a people who speak the truth, and not allow our fear of conflict or consequences allow us to miss an opportunity to bring peace. Think of a doctor who doesn’t want to tell us about a problem with our health, because he doesn’t want us to be unhappy with him.
 - ii. Yesterday, a young lady began throwing a fit in our front room, and mistreating volunteers who were trying to help. The woman didn’t have control of her faculties. I watched our team put up a soft verbal & emotional barrier gently moving the woman on to her car. She began to protest, then to sob loudly about a need for food. We helped her to make it home, and took the food to her. Strength both protected those around the woman, but also cared for her. This is peacemaking.
- d. Finally, we sow seeds of peace (James 3:18) wherever we can. Dr. Charles Wade, formerly the pastor of FBC Arlington, was my pastor for many years. When Dr. Wade was a 9 years old, he and his brother Jim were sent out to chop down trees for firewood. As the boys trekked up the dirt road, with axes over their shoulders, Charles overheard his grandfather say, “That boy’s got strong shoulders.” That day, Charles chopped down 12 trees, because he believed he had strong shoulders, but more importantly, someone believed in him.⁶

HOW DO WE RESOLVE CONFLICT?

Rick Warren, the pastor of Saddleback church, is one of the most practical preachers I know, and he offers a few practical suggestions to help when you are in conflict with someone.⁷

1. Take the Initiative – don’t ignore or deny that there is a conflict, or shove it under the rug, or let there be an elephant in the room. Peacemakers deal with the problem; Find a time where it works best for you both. Find a neutral place that allows equal footing. Go with the right attitude, and under the cover of prayer.
2. Confess your part in the conflict – even if your part is very small; Matthew 7:3 – Why do you notice the speck of dust in someone else’s eyes, but not the telephone pole in your own. We all have blind spots. Best sentence to heal/resolve conflicts – I’m sorry. I was only thinking about myself.

⁵ Carlos Lozada, The Washington Post. “Truth: Can truth survive this president? An Honest Investigation.” July 13th, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/book-party/wp/2018/07/13/feature/can-truth-survive-this-president-an-honest-investigation/?utm_term=.b02f9a1d88e9. Accessed July 15th, 2018.

⁶ Keven Gardner-Sinclair, “A Grain of Truth,” from a message titled “A Grain of Truth” on Mark 4:26-34. Preached on June 17th, 2018 at Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas. Link to the message here: https://www.wilshirebc.org/download_file/view/4929/. Accessed Saturday, July 14th, 2018.

⁷ Rick Warren, “You Make Me Crazy” 7 Key Steps to Resolving Conflict (Romans 12:14-21 (Adapted from Rick Warren’s Sermon October 7 & 8, 2017). <http://www.fountainparkumc.org/wp-content/uploads/YOU-MAKE-ME-CRAZY-7-Steps-to-Resolving-Conflict.pdf> Last accessed Saturday, July 14th, 2018.

3. Listen for the Hurt – James 1:19 – “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” Two ears, one mouth; Romans 15:2 – “We must be considerate about the doubts and fears of others.
4. Consider their perspective – Philippians 2:4-5 “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. The Greek word here is *scopos*, where we get the word to scope.
5. Tell the truth tactfully – Proverbs 12:18 says “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Be careful with your words, but also speak the truth. Are you persuasive or abrasive. Attack the problem, not the person.
6. Fix the Problem, Not the Blame – You can use your energy to fix the problem or assign blame, but not both. Never use weapons of mass destruction. I just may divorce you. Threatening to walk out if you don’t get what you want. Why would you say that. You can’t take it back. Also, never use what you know about someone against them. Bringing up family members and parents should be off limits. There are certain things you can say that will devastate the person. Don’t do it.
7. Focus on Reconciliation – not resolution. Reconciliation means restoring the relationship. If you learn to disagree without being disagreeable, that’s called wisdom. You can have unity without uniformity. That’s called wisdom. You can walk hand in hand without having to see eye to eye. That’s called wisdom.

WHAT IF THE OTHER PERSON WON’T COME TO THE TABLE?

1. Matthew 5:23 teaches us about the importance/priority of taking the initiative. If you are in church and beginning to worship, and there realize that someone has something against you – leave church to go make it right. Wow. Talk about taking the initiative. This isn’t when you have something against someone, but they have something against you. The Bible says if someone has something against you, but it doesn’t clarify if the person who has something against you is correct or incorrect in their assessment. If they are correct, then you need to go and apologize. If they are incorrect, then you still leave worship to do what you can to restore the peace.
2. What if someone has something against you, but they won’t let you come to talk? They don’t want to have anything to do with you. Psalm 7 – on slander – has a good word about this. Pray, accept your part, then let God fight your battles.

CONCLUSION

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846.

There’s more to the story. In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father’s disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply.

After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.

CONCLUDING ILLUSTRATION

When I was a freshman in college, I had an unannounced visitor. It was John Linton. He never said that he wanted to make up, but I took it as gospel, and we did. Reconciliation can happen.

INVITATION

1. What about your relationship with God today? Have you reconciled with him?
2. Would you like your relationship with him to be restored?
3. Have you read his love letter to you?
4. Would you like to pray for restored relationships?