

“HEALTHY, BIBLICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

November 14, 2021, 10:30 AM

Text for the Sermon: Matthew 7:1-5; Galatians 6:1-2; Psalm 139:23-24; Jeremiah 17:9-10

Prayer:

Introduction.

Allow me to talk about climate change. Not that climate change, another kind of climate change, one that also involves rising temperatures. The brewing storms of conflict and loss of respectful discourse in our nation, state and community. I predict they may only get worse as families gather for the holidays.

I want to offer Biblical counsel that will apply in any number of situations we might find ourselves in where there is conflict, disagreement, controversy, misunderstanding, dispute, a clash of opinions, ideas, ideology, worldview, perspective.

I hope to offer Biblical counsel that can be useful in marriage, parenting, church, school, work, community and any gathering of family, friends, or co-workers. Biblical counsel whether the issue is Covid, vaccines, politics, religion, economy, sports, schooling, parenting, money, sex, whatever we find ourselves in conflict or division over.

I am going to tackle this in two sermons because there two key parts in healthy, Biblical conflict resolution, what you do before the conflict, and what you do during it. How you prepare for the storm and how you handle the actual storm.

There are very few things in this life that you can do well without any preparation. You can't run a marathon well if you haven't first prepared well. You won't pass the test if you haven't studied. You can't sit down to a great meal if you haven't first prepared well. You won't get as much out of a sermon if you haven't prepared your heart and mind beforehand. And I certainly can't give a good sermon if I haven't read and prepared in advance.

If we are going to do conflict resolution well, if we are going to seek true reconciliation and understanding, we can't expect a good result without preparing well. This morning we will consider preliminary steps to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution. I beg you for the sake of the Gospel and our witness, for the sake of unity and peace to take this to heart.

As I begin I am assuming two things. **First**, we are Christians who desire to glorify God and honor His Word through obedience to it. The more submitted we are to Him and His Word, the more healthy our conflict resolution will be and the more fruitful will be the result.

Second, in our fallen, sinful world conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. It is never a question of if conflict will happen in our lives, but a question of when. Whenever two sinful human beings interact with each other, there will be conflict, disagreement, misunderstanding.

Conflict is normal and it is no fun. For this reason most of us try to avoid conflict as much as possible, and when we can't avoid it, we wade into it poorly and get a poor result.

There is hope and help for us in God's Word. God anticipated our need for wisdom on how to do conflict wisely and well, and He gave us much godly counsel.

There are actually several steps each of us should take before we ever talk to the person with whom we have a conflict. The better we practice these preliminary steps the better hope we can have of resolution and reconciliation.

Preliminary steps to healthy Biblical conflict resolution.

First, recognize every conflict has at least three persons involved.

God and at least two human beings who are created by God and made in the image of God.

When we got married Phama brought from her home into our home a plaque from her childhood that hangs in our kitchen. "Christ is the head of the home, the unseen guest of every meal, the silent listener to every conversation."

To our shame, that plaque has sometimes been forgotten or ignored. And if I had actually thought about it in the midst of a conflict I most likely would have dismissed it by justifying my actions with self-righteousness or sinful pride.

Hebrews 4:13 No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

God is party to every word spoken in every conflict, He sees it, hears it, He is in the midst of it. The question is whether we are aware of God's presence. When Jesus is seen as present in every conversation, every meeting, every conflict, His presence will moderate the meeting, influence the words spoken, introduce greater humility and grace.

And when we look into the other persons eyes and see an image bearer of the holy God, that tempers our reactions and responses. Kindness and compassion root out anger and hate.

God sees each person as made in His image. Both persons are sinners and He loves each one equally. We need to be clear each of us is a chief among sinners (I Timothy 1:15-16). And God still loves each of us.

This perspective should help cultivate humility, grace and peace seeking.

Second, you who are spiritual pursue restoration.

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

I am going to apply this to more than just transgressions, where there is clear sin involved. Let's apply this to all conflicts and confrontations involving disagreements or misunderstandings or differences of opinion.

“You who are spiritual.” What does that mean? Who even considers themselves spiritual? If that is the qualification for dealing with a conflict then who is qualified? It is not that complicated. It means a person who is showing some maturity, a person who is acting like a Christian in the moment. This is a person who is acting more under the influence of the Spirit rather than under the influence of the flesh.

It is easy to show the opposite. When one of my sons did something and I became angry and disciplined them in my anger, that is an example of someone unfit for doing conflict. I was not seeking restoration in a spirit of gentleness.

If you are hot under the collar, leaking steam at every fitting, spitting nickels, or otherwise just really mad, you are not spiritual and not qualified to do healthy, Biblical conflict resolution with any hope of a good outcome in that moment.

When we go into a conflict in anger we are self-focused, it becomes about our pride. When we go in a spirit of gentleness, we are others-focused, doing what is loving and best for them.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

We can get spiritual just as quickly as we get angry. Pause, take a breath, pray, remember God is here and they are made in His image, this is holy ground, exercise self-control.

Third, start by examining your own heart.

Spiritual maturity begins in the heart. Being right is not enough, your heart must be right as well. We must be right with God before we can hope to be right with one another.

All conflict begins in the heart. I have been hurt, wronged, offended, had my rights or expectations or desires dismissed or trampled on.

We must take the prophet Jeremiah's words to heart, our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (17:9). Even if we are right, we can be right in a very sinful manner.

The Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Let us honestly and humbly consider our own sinful contributions to a problem or conflict before we confront someone else.

Jesus gives excellent wisdom for how to search and examine our own hearts and thoughts.

Look at the log in your own eye.

Matthew 7:3-5 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, ***first take the log out of your own eye***, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Before we confront another person, take time to prayerfully examine our own heart. Before we go to the other person, let us go to the Lord and do some self-reflection.

There are certain fixed laws in nature like the law of gravity and there are certain fixed laws in human nature, like wanting to put 100% of the blame for conflict on someone else; and seeing others sins as much larger than our own.

Thinking you're not part of the problem is often part of the problem.

This is one of Jesus' best known and best remembered illustrations to help us remember this fundamental law of human nature. It's both funny and serious. Picture a person with a 2x12 sticking out of their eye coming up to you and saying, "Here let me get that little piece of sawdust out of the corner of your eye."

There are two sets of eyes in this passage, look in your own first. It's so easy to confess other people's sins. We can do it all day long and many of us do, especially husbands and wives. Our vision is 20/20 when we look at others but when we look in the mirror we are legally blind, 20/400.

Few things are more difficult than to bring ourselves to acknowledge our own faults and weaknesses. It is so much easier to be a critic of others than of ourselves.

Remember *David's* adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah. Remember after about a year God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David and Nathan tells a story about a man who had lots of sheep but when a guest came he went and took the only sheep of another man to feed his guest? Remember David's response?

II Samuel 12:5-6 David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

David was able to instantly judge that man's sin and failed to see his own, until Nathan, said "you are the man."

Can I identify my contribution to the conflict? Have I been angry, have I lashed out, have I tried to win at the expense of another's interests? Have I harbored bitterness, resentment, have I gossiped about the other person? What am I afraid of? What do I want more than anything else? Where is Satan working, where am I giving him an opportunity?

Whatever my contribution I must repent of my sins against God and others and move my heart to an attitude of humility and grace. Only then will there be hope of reconciliation and peace.

After you have taken care of your own business, after you have repented and turned from your own sin, then you can help your brother. And chances are better he will receive your help and see it actually as help if it's from one who has been down the same road and is not coming off self-righteous or arrogant or hypocritical.

The purpose of self-reflection is not to identify where blame lies or who is at fault. The purpose is to sufficiently prepare your heart to handle the conflict in a manner that glorifies God.

Fourth, Pray, forgive and bless.

Before you confront another person, pray for that person and for your relationship and ask the Holy Spirit to work in both your hearts.

Ask God to do the impossible, that's what He specializes in. Ever since Genesis 3:15 God has been working redemptively to restore relationships and He can restore and reconcile whatever difficult circumstance we find ourselves in.

Ask God to forgive the sin in both of you and ask for God's blessing on both of you. By praying a prayer of forgiveness and blessing you drain away anger, bitterness, disappointment. By praying a prayer of forgiveness and blessing your heart will grow in love and grace toward the other person. It is almost impossible to stay angry with someone you pray for.

Matthew 6:12 Forgive those who sin against us

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 Bear with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. So we should be the most forgiving people in the world. God's forgiveness is meant to leave a lasting impression on us, a life changing impression.

Those who see they need mercy and have cried out for mercy and have received mercy should be those who are most merciful. Those who minimize their own sins and exaggerate the sins of others show themselves to have no clue about their own debt.

It makes all the difference to know the cost that was paid to forgive our debt first, the cost to make us both forgiven people and forgiving people.

No one gives grace better than a person who is convinced of their own need of it and who is deeply aware of the grace they have been, and are being, given.

God is the most glorious being in the universe. God's glory shines brightest on the cross where He forgives our sins. Our incalculable debt has been covered by an incalculable gift and that same grace now flows from God through us to each other. That same glory that shines on us shines through us to each other. There is no glory and no joy like the glory and joy of forgiveness and reconciliation. For the sake of the glory of the grace of God let's forgive all the debts of sin owed to all of us by everyone every day.

Conclusion.

The Gospel prepares us to be effective ministers of reconciliation. God is the ultimate peacemaker when He made peace with us through the blood of Jesus and reconciled us to Himself. We are called to do as He did and do likewise.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Begin by seeing what the world cannot see, that every human being is made in the image of God, and seeing that changes how we treat one another.

Before rushing into a conflict wait until we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit exercising the fruit of gentleness and self-control.

Then let us examine our own hearts, and look for the log in our own eyes.

Finally, let us pray for forgiveness and blessing on each other. If Jesus can pray “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” then certainly we can pray forgiveness for each other.

I urge you to put these preparations into practice this week.

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 14:19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.