

Intro Conflict with others is a considerable challenge in our lives that neutralizes and drains our energy for a joyful advancement of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Conflict occurs in our marriages, families, small groups, ministry teams . . . anywhere people connect with people to do something together, there is potential for misunderstanding, differences, competition, unmet expectations, jealousy, hurt feelings or angry outbursts. In terms of spiritual power and focus necessary to advance the gospel, the cost of unresolved conflict is huge and growing in churches and families like ours.

The energy and commitment necessary to gloss over problems, run away from conflict, shift the blame, withhold attention, nurse our grudges and deny responsibility is significant. Our partnership in the gospel requires that we be careful and active in setting our minds on the same things. That we not allow our hearts to be separated from each other by our pursuit of satisfaction in things other than Christ. Resolving conflict – being like-minded, not only frees you up to stand firm for Christ but it connects you to others who are standing firm in a powerful and joyful way.

Note from our reading of God’s Word earlier from Jesus’ teaching that responding well to conflict is a core concern for those who determine to live in God’s kingdom. Jesus introduces mind boggling alternative concepts to handling conflict in our lives. The life devoted to Jesus will be distinctly marked by a response to conflict that is absolutely foreign to most people. Think about it . . . you are blessed and identified as God’s son if you make peace with those that treat you badly. Reconciling with your brother is more important than and a necessary preparation for effective worship. You will not see the problem or fault of another person without severe self examination first. We are to be known as Christ’s followers for our love for one another. We must learn to set our hearts and minds on the same things rather than tolerate division and conflict.

Setting our minds on the same thing or being likeminded is a repeated concern addressed in this letter to the Philippians. Ten times the word is used to draw our attention to the attitude shifts that we need to advance the gospel with joy. Like us, these church members faced opposition of all kinds. One of the first casualties of war in our lives is that our hearts seek satisfaction in things other than God which leads us to a progression of conflict with others. This conflict is brought to our attention in 4:1-3 by a public call for two women to think the same way.

Philippians 4:1-3

Admonition to stand firm	1
Stand firm by resolving conflict	2-3

Standing firm is a theme repeated in the scriptures to the person who is rightly related to God by faith. We read often through story and admonition alike that we are to persevere, persist, be steadfast and continue in obedience if we are to experience the joy of knowing God in our daily lives. The joy of our faith (1:25) is worth fighting persistently for and it is only attainable through persevering obedience of faith. Standing firm is persevering and persisting in trouble until you have found greater joy and delight in God.

Often the trouble we want to persist in involves conflict with others. Ask for God’s help right now to hear, understand and respond with the urgency expressed in these verses as we seek to listen to God about standing firm in conflict.

Consider and adjust your thinking about conflict according to these truths from God's word:

1. Conflict happens. 4:2-3

Note the unusual reference to two specific ladies in the Philippian church. While we do not know or have any hints as to what the conflict between these ladies was about, we know that they were active participants in the ministry of the gospel there in Philippi. They played a significant role in the ministry as they struggled along with Paul and others in the gospel. We learn that two people committed to Christ and participating in gospel ministry can have a sustained, public, dangerous conflict. This unresolved conflict can be of such danger to the unity of the church and advance of the gospel that the Apostle writes about it publically bringing it out in the open before everyone's attention.

Conflicts occur in any relationship. The Apostle seemingly brings out the theme of like mindedness again, only this time in the form of a well known, practical example of two people that everyone knows. Let's learn what causes conflicts. What causes them and how do we get to the heart of conflict.

- Conflict is a focus on self rather than Christ. 2:1-5
 - 2:3 rivalry – strife, faction, quarrelsomeness, self seeking Gal.5:20 – work of the flesh
 - 2:3 conceit – vainglory, factiousness, for own glory
 - 2:2, 4-5 - Conflict is the absence of unity and Christ-like servanthood with others.
- Conflict is the presence of unsatisfied desires in our hearts. James 4:1-3
 - 4:1 – battling desires
 - 4:2 – desire and do not have
 - 4:2 – you covet and cannot obtain
 - 4:3 – to spend on your passions/pleasures
 - Dwelling on the disappointment of unmet or unsatisfied desires. Lk.12:13-15; Mt 15:19

2. Conflict requires urgent resolution. 4:2-3

The scriptures repeat the word 'entreat' twice to express a sense of urgency that this conflict be resolved. The command leaves no question of intent . . . come to the same way of thinking. The mention of this in such a public manner supports the sense that this is an urgent matter. Why is conflict so unacceptable? Why does this sense of intense urgency seem a bit over the top to those of us who have grown use to living in conflict with others? What is the real issue involved?

Conflict requires urgent attention because of the gospel. We turn again to Paul's testimony in chapter three to get our bearings. Christ, the cross and the gospel are set aside when our hearts are in conflict with another person. Counting all things loss for Christ's sake is the opposite of holding onto unsatisfied desires in our hearts. Suffering, weakness and dying to self cannot coexist with other self centered

1. **Conflict happens.** **4:2-3**
2. **Conflict requires urgent resolution.** **4:2-3**
3. **Conflict resolution requires outside help.**

I desire
 I demand unmet desires or unsatisfied wants move to a demand
 I judge demand usually leads to judging other people when they fail to satisfy our
 I punish 'Idols always demand sacrifices'

Take Aways

1. Repent of your lack of satisfaction in God, your heart's idolatry.
2. Take steps to identify conflicts in your life by asking 'what do I want?'
3. Ask for help.
4. Determine to fight for joy by resolving conflicts with others.

Study Questions

1. What impressions or decisions did you come to as a result of the teaching of God's Word today?
2. Read Philippians 4:1-9 as a group.
3. What is the difference between conflict that needs to be resolved and 'agreeing to disagree' kind of issues? Tell a story from your life of unresolved conflict and what you have learned from it.
4. Read Romans 12:14-21 and summarize key thoughts or principles that help you understand and resolve conflict.
5. Read James 4:1-12 and summarize key thoughts or principles that help you understand and resolve conflict. Review and practice explaining the desire – demand – judge – punish progression that idolatry produces.
6. What impact does unresolved personal conflict have on joy? Why?
7. What are ways that you judge and punish those who do not meet your demands for satisfaction? What attitudes, disciplines or mindsets mentioned in 4:4-9 will help insure conflict free relationships?
8. What are some principles to follow when trying to help others resolve conflict?
9. Focus your prayer time on praying for each other to stand firm in Christ in the area of resolving conflicts by rooting out idols of the heart. Share specific requests, challenges and concerns about the pressures you currently face.