

THE BIBLICAL FAMILY

WEEK 5: HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICT BIBLICALLY IN THE FAMILY?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- In this 6-week series we are going to discuss the Biblical family. This is going to be an overview of what the Bible says about some key topics, roles and patterns that should be in every family.
- Week 1: What is a Biblical family?
- Week 2: What priorities do parents, husbands & wives, have in their family?
- Week 3: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part I
- Week 4: How do husbands and wives' function in the family? Part II
- Week 5: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part I
- **Week 6: How can conflicts be handled and resolved Biblically? Part II**
- The overall goal of this class is to give theological understanding and practical wisdom on the purpose of the family and how God desires to use the family for His glory and for our good.

WHY DO WE HAVE CONFLICT?

- **James 4:1-3** “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”
- This passage describes the root cause of conflict in each person...conflict comes when we have unmet desires which originate in our hearts.
- While conflict always involve more than just you, conflict comes when we have set an expectation in our own heart and that expectation is not met.
- **A common question:** what about when I have done nothing wrong and conflict comes upon me?
 - Many people believe that they have a “right” to respond to someone when they have not been talked to with “respect.”
 - This idea is still an unmet expectation in one’s heart. You “expect” to be talked to in a certain way and when that does not happen, you respond sinfully in anger or shouting.

- While how the other person has talked to you or treated you may not be kind at all, you may still have expectations in your heart, which when not met, are exposed through your sinful response.
- **Speaking on James 4:1-3** “At the very bottom, after all else has been scraped off, James sees the desire for pleasure as the cause (vv. 1, 2). These desires for pleasure, literally translated, are “soldiering” or “campaigning” in one’s bodily members. That is, they are in full muster and are prepared to fight to obtain the pleasures your counselee desires. **The warfare, then, begins within.**”¹
- The war over our heart is *always* taking place. There is never a time that you are not in the battle for how you are going to act, react and respond as a Christian.
- **“So to sum up, outer quarrels among Christians come from losing battles within.** Once again James takes an inside view of man. James does this, as before when dealing with temptation, **to expose the dynamic at work so that you will know where to aim your efforts to rectify the situation. It is within that the first and foremost change must begin.** One must realize his sin, confess it and seek God’s forgiveness (and the forgiveness of those he has offended) and then, after reconciliation, begin to put on the new, biblical, righteous ways outlined in the Scriptures.”²
- We have conflict on the outside because we are allowing sin to dominate on the inside. Every conflict that you have had, either good or bad, can be traced back to some expectation which has not been met.
- Even in a positive setting, when someone does not meet the expectations at work, they must be confronted, told they are not doing what is expected, be told again what is expected and then either trained on how to do their job or possibly let go.
- When someone sins, we are told in **Galatians 6:1** “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one** in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too **will not be tempted.**”
- That is a command from Paul, *you go and restore the sinning brother!* That means that Paul is commanding Christians to go into conflict.
- Conflict is not to be avoided but to be done in a Biblical and loving manner.
- So, we have conflict because of our own expectations not being met or because someone else has not met the expectations which were set out for them and we need to correct them.

¹ Jay E. Adams, Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude, *The Christian Counselor’s Commentary* (Cordova, TN: The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 200.

² Ibid. p. 201

MONITORING OUR OWN HEARTS³

- Sande lays out four ways that we can see the progression of idols or expectations in our own heart.

I Desire

- Conflict always begins with a desire. It is important to note that not all desires are evil. Obviously if we desire vengeance or greed, that would be sinful.
- But there is nothing wrong with desiring a clean home, a spouse, a new car, etc.
- Some of these “good desires” will come and some will pass. There will be some things that you are able to obtain and others which may allude you your whole life.
- The question that we need to ask is, *what if we never get what we desire?* What if, the good desire never comes to fruition?
- Do you trust that the Lord will not withhold anything good from you?
- **Psalm 84:11-12 “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in You!”** Is this the heart attitude that you have when your desires go unmet?
- As Sande says “On the other hand, you can dwell on your disappointment and allow it to control your life. At the very least, this will result in self-pity and bitterness toward [the reason you think you can’t have what you want]. At worst, it can destroy your [relationship] with anyone who has gotten in your way.”

I Demand

- The downward spiral begins after your expectations are not met and you begin to dwell on the notion that you are not getting what you deserve.
- This unmet desire or expectation begins to dig down deeper into the heart. The more that we think we need or deserve something, the deeper this thing digs down.
- **The more that something is wanted, the more we think we need and deserve it.**
- When we believe the thing we desire is essential to our fulfillment and well-being, it has just moved from a desire to a demand.
- **Speaking in Biblical terms, this thing has just become an idol.**
- In Biblical terms, anything that we set our heart on, anything that we depend on or desire more than God has taken its place as our idol.
- Idols are not just from sin but they can (and often in Christian’s lives) arise from good desires. Often the problem is not what we want, but the fact that we want too much, or something does not come soon enough.

³ Ken Sande *Peace Making for Families* pp. 17-22.

- For example, it is not too much to want a nice quiet evening at home, but to want that all time at the expense of everyone and everything else, it then becomes your ruling desire.
- If you have a desire to see your children love and obey God, both for His glory and their good, this is a good desire. But for it to be a Godly desire, your response to your children's disobedience should be Godly discipline.
- If your true heart's desire is comfort and quiet, though you say it's for God's glory, when the child sins your reaction will be quite different than a loving and caring parent.

I Judge

- After the desire has taken root as an idol in the heart, the next step is judgment.
- When people fail to satisfy our desires and live up to our expectations, we are quick to criticize and condemn them...both in our hearts and with our words.
- This is where we should start to come to our senses. We have now doubled our idols...we have one ruling in our hearts, dictating our actions...and we have now set ourselves up as the ultimate judge. "This is a formula for excruciating conflict."
- Sinful judging is characterized best when we speculate on what others' motives are against us.
- The reason this is so heinous is because it reveals a real lack of love and concern towards people.
- This type of judgment seems to happen the most among the people who are the closest to you. In a family setting, because of the closeness of your relationships, it is very easy to have expectations which become conditions and standards that we ultimately use to judge one another.

I Punish

- "Idols always demand sacrifice. When others fail to satisfy our demands and expectations, our idols demand that they should suffer." We do this either deliberately, looking for ways to make people pay, or we do it subconsciously, by no longer thinking well about this person.
- This punishment can be anger, lashing out in a rage, using our words to try and bring hurt to someone. It is only when someone gives into our desire that we will stop coming against them.
- We punish those who do not bow down to our idols.
- "As we grow in faith and awareness of our sin, most of us recognize and reject overt and obviously sinful means of punishing others. But, our idols do not give up their influence easily, and they often lead us to develop more subtle means of punishing those who do not serve them."
- We do things like withdrawing from relationships so that the other person will feel the loss.
- We may withhold communication or affection or walk around gloomy around them.

- This is the surest way of knowing you have an idol actively ruling in your heart.

HOW DO WE CURE IDOLS IN OUR HEART TO MAKE PEACE?

- An idol is something that we love, fear and/or trust. It is something that we think we must have in order to be truly happy or fulfilled.
- As Sande says, “**Love, fear, trust – these are words of worship!** Jesus commands us to love God, fear God, and trust God alone (Matthew 22:37; Luke 12:4-5, John 14:1). Any time we long for something apart from God, fear something more than God, or trust in something other than God to make us happy, fulfilled, or secure, we are engaging in the worship of false gods. As a result, we deserve the judgment and wrath of the true God.”⁴
- God has provided the cure for our idolatry problem by sending Christ to die on the cross and take the punishment which we deserved.
- When there are idols in your heart, they must be repented of, and our worship must be put back on God.
- “**Sin is what you do when you are not fully satisfied in God.**” In other words, we have idols because we are not fully satisfied with what God has provided for us. If we are not fully satisfied in Him, we will be forever looking for other sources of satisfaction and security.

PRACTICALLY MAKING PEACE IN THE HOME

- After taking a look at what goes on in our own hearts, we can now proceed to confrontation.
- There are four steps which are crucial to making sure the confrontation is God honoring and not self-exalting.

Rules for Confrontation

- How you go into a confrontation or how you react when being confronted is key to how it is going to go.
- Not all confrontation is a planned interaction, so it is vital that you are *always ready* by keeping your heart and mind on the heavenly things.
- **Colossians 3:1** “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”
 - The *set your mind* is a command from Paul. Our daily lives should be consumed with thinking things that are above. If that is the case, then when something comes upon us, we are less likely to respond in such a way that is sinful and hurtful.

⁴ Ken Sande *Peace Making for Families* pp. 25

- Walking through Ephesians 4:25-32 “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and do not give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. ²⁹Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
 - **Verse 25: Be honest** (speak truth each one of you)
 - **Verses 26-27: Keep Current** (do not let the sun go down on your anger)
 - **Verse 29: Attack the problem...not the person** (no unwholesome word come from your mouth)
 - **Verses 30-32: Act...don’t react** (be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another)
- No matter what the situation, your family, friends, co-workers, etc. this is how the Bible says that we are to talk to one another.
- We are to talk to *all* people like this, not just believers and not just those who talk nicely to us.
- Not only do we talk to build up and understand, we also must be good listeners.
- James 1:9 “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger...”
 - If we are being confronted, be sure to wait and hear the whole situation.
 - If you are confronting someone, allow them to fully respond to what you are saying.
 - This assures that you are present in the meeting with your full mind.
 - The most harmful thing you can do is play out a conversation in your mind *before* you go and talk with someone. The conversation rarely goes as you think it will and when it does it may be that you are to blame for not paying attention during the interaction.
- Proverbs 18:21 “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.”
 - Use words that seek to bring life, not put down the other person. If you are using words that put people down, it shows what is in your own heart, not there’s.
 - Stay away from *always* and *never*. Don’t call people names or try to manipulate the situation into your favor by blaming them for what you have done.
- There are many situations which could have been avoided by people simply communicating better with one another.
- Do not allow the devil to come in and wreak havoc in this area in your life.

Confession and Repentance

- The first practical step in making peace in the home is owning up to what you did wrong. What we did wrong came from what was wrongfully in our hearts.
- So you examine your heart for the idol or expectation that was there, recognize it and then address the sin which you committed on behalf of your idol.
- Confession of our sin to a family member is no easy task.
- “Puffed up with self-absorption, living in a world where asserting one’s rights is considered one of the, if not *the*, most important aspects of our lives, it is not easy to confess one’s contribution to a conflict. But the fact is, we frequently contribute in some way to relational problems. Whether it be through our words, our thoughts, our motives, our attitudes, or our deeds, we are more often than not guilty of either starting or at least aggravating any conflict we are involved in.”⁵
- **Proverbs 28:13 “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”**
- The only reason that one does not want to confess their sin is because of pride. If one truly wants to reconcile with someone else, *this must take place*.
- “It is this principle, that confession leads to forgiveness, which governs the whole peacemaking process. It is certainly the operating principle that restores peace between us and our God. and for effective peacemaking efforts here on earth, it should be the primary engine that motives conflict resolution within our families.”⁶
- In order for forgiveness to take place, there must be confession. While we are to have an attitude of forgiveness, not holding grudges against people, the relationship cannot move forward until there is confession and repentance of sin which was committed.
- Much of the conflict which arises in families has to do with our words toward one another. We must be careful and understand that our words may not convey to someone exactly what we are trying to say.
- If something said has offended someone, even inadvertently, it is our responsibility to confess and repent.

Forgiveness

- When someone has wronged you and asks for your forgiveness, as a Christian you are to forgive.
- “Because Christians are the most forgiven people in the world, we should be the most forgiving people in the world as well. God forgives us perfectly and completely, and He calls us to forgive...in like manner.”⁷

⁵ Ibid. pp. 50-51.

⁶ Ibid. p. 50.

⁷ Ibid. p. 83-84.

- There is a problem though, we are not God nor can we forgive as God has. Our forgiveness usually fails to match the glorious forgiveness which God grants through Christ.
- We will have sinful inclinations to dwell on the incident, never really letting it go. As the one who is forgiving, you must continually remind yourself of the gospel, of your new identity in Christ and seek the power of the Holy Spirit.
- While this is true, so is the fact that God calls us to forgive and not let that *thing* rule over our life.
- The four rules often offered to make sure forgiveness “sticks” are:⁸
 - I will not think about the incident.
 - I will not bring up the incident again and use it against you.
 - I will not talk to others about this incident.
 - I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Reconciliation

- This is not the same as restoration, when the relationship goes back to “how it was” before the issue came about between these people.
- This is the time when the two people begin to restore their relationship. This step of reconciliation will not and can not come to fruition until forgiveness has been granted.
- This is when we start to see the fruit of repentance and the people are able to be around one another again.
- **2 Corinthians 2:6-8** “Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”
- The man in Corinth had repented, the church and Paul had forgiven him, but he was still outcast. Paul is urging the church to *reaffirm their love for him*. In other words, be reconciled.

Restoration

- Once the relationship is reconciled, the process of restoration can take place. This may be instantaneously or may take some time.
- The relationship may be as it was or may come with some new boundaries. The relationship may not be “restored” if the sin was great, but the people are not uncomfortable being around one another.

⁸ Ibid. p. 85-92.