

“Speaking from the Heart”

Lesson 9: When we don’t agree”

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🔑 “So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:12, 13).

Some are so conflicted in communication that they never resolve divisions. These are likened to the two first-down markers at a football game: they are chained together but always ten yards apart!

Communication Down!

🔑 Conflict communication is a troubling reality because it exposes the worldly attitudes that compromise God’s People.

🔑 Matthew 12:36-37 applies to communication when Christians are controlled and quickly spew emotionally loaded “careless words.” They choose to communicate with words that “do not work” to resolve conflict. They use words fueling the sinful emotions and fanning the flames of anger.

🔑 A personal query only YOU can answer. When you are involved in a heated conflict, are you really concerned about using “careless words”?

Conflict communication is 🔑 doomed when it has these characteristics:

- Quit listening
- No positive movement toward resolution—“will not budge an inch.”
- Pride dominates and humility is expected only from others
- Quickly displays their “Trophy Hurts” by angry accusations and insults
- Eyes of vengeance Proverbs 6:17, “Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.”
- And, all involved in an angry conflict find no “satisfaction”!

A woman told of her mother’s way of communicating grievances, complaints, insults, and sarcasm about her husband. She would loudly voice her bitter and cutting words to the family dog, and at times when family was visiting, she used the family’s presence to rebuke her husband in the same cutting way. “Well Bowser, he NEVER will do that! I would be ashamed of myself if I acted like that, wouldn’t you?” And Bowser looks at her with a wagging tail and she sits back smugly thinking she has just “told him off good.” “He won’t listen to me so maybe the dog will listen to me.”

Two young people come for marriage counseling. They have been married only for a few months, but already a conflict pattern is firmly established and repeated with tragic predictability. They expose the common conflict communication pattern failing: They disagree over an issue. She comes from a family environment where the mother’s voice dominated in the family dynamic. You did NOT ever question the mother’s words. So, the daughter grew up feeling she was in charge because of the mother’s behavior. So, she feels insulted when her way is rejected. She raises her voice. Tempers flare and yelling occur. He grows silent. She yells louder. He withdraws. She cries. He walks away!

🔑 **Living in a world of conflict**

Earthly life has many experiences that will absolutely happen. One of these is the inevitability of conflict. Each person is individual and unique. This difference separates them from others.

- 🔑 We are raised in different environments. This causes us to look at the world with different viewpoints.
- 🔑 My needs, my ideas, my interests, my vocabulary, and my personality styles are not the same as yours and in fact MY is always MORE important than yours. It is this selfish Pride that Paul addressed: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more

important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

- The longer you and I communicate, the more apparent these differences become. And, when one is coerced to behaviors that are contrary to their early years, the greater is the eruption of conflict.
- Especially fueling the conflict is personal pride. Some will never apologize; never admit wrong in their views; never show humility; but, always expect the other(s) involved in the conflict to bow the knee to them!

These are the ones sitting in the pews thinking, "Preach on! So-n-so is really getting blasted!"

These never think they can do wrong and so all conflict issues are NOT on them, but someone else.

And, they are quick to tell Bowser the list of mistakes done to them but not by them!

- Have you known someone who never apologized to anyone? They refused to admit any personal wrongs. But they are quick to point the blame at others! Such is a miserable person and will live miserably in eternity!

Most conflicts are humorous at the beginning, but if left unresolved, will metastasize into a disastrous ending. How many marriages are ended because of "irreconcilable differences"?

- The "little things" irritate and provoke us with the greatest power. Have you ever heard conflict communication over the way one "squeezed" toothpaste onto the toothbrush? What about whether the toilet paper should be "over" or "under" the roll?
- "For we all stumble in many ways...the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire...the tongue...sets on fire the course of our life (James 3:2-6).

Conflict Means...

The word means "to strike together; fight; battle; struggle; or sharp disagreements." It is a collision between self's interests or ideas with another who thinks differently. It is a clash over the practices learned growing up that you cherish and those cherished practices another learned growing up. And often these are neither right nor wrong, moral or immoral, legal or illegal! It is initiated by one thinking this is the ONLY way this action can be done, and all must do it as I do it! Do not think you are above this evil.

The question highlighted in this lesson asks, "How do you respond to conflict? What words do you use to communicate? Are they words of reconciliation, recrimination, or retaliation?"

Conflict, like anger, is not in itself a sin. In fact, there must be some conflicts if we are to be pleasing to God Ephesians 5:11, "Do not participate in the useless deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them."

The term "expose" is translated from a Greek word meaning reprove, rebuke, discipline, convict to be guilty. It describes behavior of Christians to convict, rebuke, refute, reprimand, show...fault. Thus, God expects His People to be involved in conflict.

The ORIGIN of conflict

James offers an incisive analysis of destructive conflict's origin.

"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is the source not your pleasures that wage war in your body's parts? You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel...You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend what you request on your pleasures" (James 4:1-3).

Destructive conflicts share a common feeder. Whether the conflict is between two individuals, two families or two nations, it usually shares the initial spark which is: "I want my way, and I will do whatever it takes to get my way."

Destructive conflicts begin with our "desires/pleasures."

- The Greek word is enlightening. It is ἡδονῶν (hēdonōn). We get the English word "hedonism" from this term.
- The word hedonism describes a person's life philosophy devoted wholly to the pursuit of self's pleasures—☞ "I will do what I want so I will be pleased and happy."
- This has been nicknamed "The Playboy Philosophy" or "The ME Philosophy."

The pursuit of, and defenses to, our personal pleasures turn the most trivial differences into bloody verbal warfare (look back at Lesson 6 and "Trophy Hurts"). The initial issue may be silly and insignificant, but it is emotionally defended because you have Pride invested, and you refuse to show humility!

It is ☞ "YOUR way verses MY way!" And there are no winners in this conflict—in fact many remain a "frozen conflict" that is never resolved but always just under the relationship's surface.

Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) illustrates this conflict pattern of James 4. Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard. Naboth refused. Ahab pouted. Jezebel conspired to slander and engineer Naboth's murder. Ahab got what he wanted because of the callous conscience of Ahab and Jezebel's conflict resolution process.

James summarizes this sordid event: "(E)ach one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it has run its course, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters" (James 1:14-16).

The MOTIVE of conflict

One of Teddy Roosevelt's sons once said of his famous father: "Father always wants to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral."

Destructive conflicts arise because people think ☞ the universe revolves around them. They are convinced that ☞ their way is the ONLY right way. They think everyone ought to enjoy eating what they think is delicious. The devilish temptation is to place our needs at the center of every issue in life! From lawn care, washing cars, cooking, eating, clothing, etc. Some are locked and loaded to engage on EVERY issue in life and tell others that the only correct way is THEIR WAY and what THEY SAY!

The attitude that initiates destructive conflict is a ☞ sin never confessed—selfish human desire. When have you heard anyone confess selfishness? "I want what I want" summarizes this evil. It can be modified to say, ☞ "I want what I want and ONLY what I want—I do not want any differences!"

The foundation of Christian ethics is "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17). Destructive conflicts are ☞ fueled by a spirit of covetousness or hedonism. And disaster awaits because we have adopted an anti-God philosophy. Covetousness/greed is idolatry because ☞ we place OUR desires as authority for OUR actions and words—"I covet MY way" (Colossians 3:5, "Covetousness which is also idolatry.").

It is saying ☞ "I do not want what God can give me (James 4:2); I am not interested in what others think; I am not interested in God's way or your way; I want it MY way."

The RESOLUTION of conflict

Those locked into a repeating cycle of destructive conflict will suffer if resolution is not possible. Remember that YOU can only correct the percentage of the conflict that is your part. You cannot correct another's part of the conflict. Those who try to correct others involved in conflict only create more devastation.

☞ Resolution begins with ME. I realize I can only correct my part. The other(s) involved may not be interested in correcting their part. I can only do what I can do! Others may advise us and encourage us, but until we initiate the resolution by doing MY part, all will only become worse.

This means that I need to look, not at another but at myself. Ask yourself, ☞ "Is my pride, fear, anger, poor habits, family background, etc. the real fault?" I need to talk to myself, not Bowser, about MY faults. I need to ☞ "clean up my own backyard before attacking others." This is very difficult but is critical.

Resolving destructive conflict is seldom easy. But in Christ we have the instruction, examples, motivation and power to resolve conflicts, especially with other Christians. With God's help we can resolve destructive conflicts with ☞ four resolutions:

- I resolve not to be quarrelsome.
- I resolve to accept personal responsibility for my part in the conflict.
- I resolve to accept you as you are.
- I resolve to forgive you AS God has forgiven me.

☞ *I resolve not to be quarrelsome.*

The person who is ☞ constantly disagreeable is NOT speaking from the heart as God expects. One may be ill, may have health issues that result in chronic pain, may have ☞ many other "excuses" for being disagreeable, but those reasons do not justify a sour, caustic, bitter attitude. Why are some in those conditions "sweet" while others are "sour"? ☞ It is a choice!

Have you ever observed how some are disagreeable but when guests appear they instantly change! Their "playing nice" only covers their inward vulgarities and their evil character. They well know what they are doing. Close friends and family try to rationalize and excuse the crass behavior but God sees and hears and will hold accountable on the Day of Judgment!

Those who are "born in the objective case and irritable mood" are NOT pleasing to God! ☞ The quarrelsome person has a fire of irritability that functions like a pilot light, always burning and ready at a moment to touch off a major combustion.

Such are hypocrites, are living contrary to God's commands and are subjects of the Lord's harshest words of damnation. "So, you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28).

Such visibly show they have not "tasted the kindness of the Lord" and are lost! "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord (1 Peter 2:1).

A quarrelsome person never resolves conflict. They continue chewing on the old complaints and polishing their Trophy Hurts! They drain marriages, exhaust friend's relationships, and sour children and grandchildren's affection.

The tap root feeding the quarrelsome person's conflict is pride. Things are not going the way they want; people are not doing the things they want. Cut through all of the "reasons" and you find that it is another "ME, ME, ME" incident. Their life is ungodly because it is "all about ME." And they have the audacity to call themselves "Christians."

- "Through overconfidence (pride) comes nothing but strife" (Proverbs 13:10).
- "He who loves to quarrel loves sin" (Proverbs 17:19).

☞ *I resolve to accept MY responsibility in the conflict.*

This ☞ requires one to say, "I was wrong. I am sorry." Sadly, some will not do this. It takes strength and courage to admit you were wrong. It is biblical, "Therefore confess your sins one to the other and pray for one another" (James 5:16).

A revealing question asks, ☞ "Do you love the one in conflict MORE that you love a victory over them?" If you do love them more than the victory, why not swallow your pride and accept your responsibility for the conflict?

The REAL issue in conflict resolution asks, ☞ "Am I more focused on MY PRIDE or on MY LOVE?"

1 Corinthians 6:7 addresses conflict. "(I)t is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits (conflicts) with one another. Why not rather suffer the wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?"

☞ *I resolve to accept you.*

This requires us to 🙏 accept that others are different and that means MY WAY is not the only way to do things. It means you will not resent the differences and that you will not express sarcastic and bitter words as you describe the differences, from you, that some have.

"Why can't you see it MY way?" Simply because each is different! They cannot see it YOUR way because they see it THEIR way!"

"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you" (Romans 15:7).

It is not right to accept and tolerate illegal, ungodly, immoral, unscriptural and unjust behavior. Scripture stresses that teaching/believing false doctrines and supporting ungodly lifestyles are wrong and need rebuked. But in Romans 15:7 the acceptance is to extend grace to another and learn to accept them as equal to you. It is right to tolerate and accept another's individuality in matters not biblically bound.

The message Inspiration communicates to us in 1 Corinthians 12 is that our personal and individual differences are to be applauded and each used to make the Church grow. If all did the same thing, the Church would not develop in a healthy manner. To require every member in the congregation to do the same things is to cause the growth of the Church to be unhealthy!

🙏 *I resolve to forgive you.*

🙏 I will emulate God's mercy. 🙏 I will demonstrate His attitude toward me. A forgiving spirit is very visible. Such will open the door to conflict resolution.

Jesus does not consider conflict resolution to be one-sided. Christ does not want the urgency of conflict resolution to be shrugged off. 🙏 There must be action. Failure to act and resolve conflict resolution corrupts our worship and our relationship with God.

"If you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Come to good terms with your accuser quickly" (Matthew 5:23-25).

Conflict resolution is 🙏 not optional. If we are not seeking to reconcile then we are not in a good relationship with Christ. If we are unwilling to confess our part and ask for forgiveness, then we are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin thinking we are totally innocent. This leads to us being condemned in God's sight. "But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called 'today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "In a word to live, forgiveness. Without it no human relationship can survive. Don't insist on your rights...don't find fault with each other, but accept each other as you are, and forgive each other every day from the bottom of your heart." (*Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1953).

🙏 **Conflicts in the New Testament**

The Scriptures are given to us so we can understand God's directions and can make choices that brings satisfaction in life (2 Timothy 3:16). Since conflicts are the cause of man's dissatisfaction, we can look at the Scriptures and find instruction to help us in conflict resolution.

🙏 *Jesus and the Pharisees (Mark 3:1-6)*

Conflict—The Jewish tradition limited the practice of medicine and healing on the Sabbath. Cases of life and death were considered exemptions to the Sabbath Law. But a man's withered hand did not constitute treatment allowed under the exception.

Resolution—Jesus healed the man contending that "doing good" was as lawful on the Sabbath as "saving a life." It is important to note that Jesus is the one igniting the conflict in this situation. Why did Jesus initiate the conflict? His opponents remained silent. Also, Christ could have compromised and healed the man the next day. Christ initiated the conflict because the Pharisees had abused God's Law. They were putting man's doctrines above the directives of the Lord God Almighty. He used conflict resolution to confront and teach (Mark 2:27, "Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath'").

When Good's Truth is set aside so man's opinion will be the governing factor, there must be conflict initiated!

Jesus and the Sanhedrin (John 11:45-54)

Conflict—The popularity of Christ posed a threat to the religious establishment. The Jewish leaders began plotting how they could eliminate this threat. The arrest and execution of Christ was their answer to safeguard their prestige, power and position.

Resolution—Rather than having His ministry prematurely terminated, Christ temporarily distanced Himself from His enemies. Christ saw how volatile the conflict situation had developed. If He remained in that situation the entire ministry would suffer. So, He chose a "strategic withdrawal." By avoiding the conflict at that time, Christ was able to complete His ministry successfully. The conflict was only postponed so the mission would be completed and the objective achieved.

Sometimes situations flare up and invite immediate and intense battles. But we need to judge when is the opportune time for the battle. There are times when the battle is not ready and one must wait. Be assured that the conflict will pop-up again and that will be the time to charge into battle!

Jewish and Gentile Church Leaders (Acts 15:1-35)

Conflict—The Jewish Church leaders were insisting that the Gentile converts to Christ be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. This was a conflict full of intense and demanding emotions.

Resolution—The Apostles, elders and other Church leaders met in Jerusalem to discuss this conflict. They discussed the issue. Each spoke. A satisfactory resolution decided that the entire Old Law, including circumcision, was not binding on Gentiles because such were Jewish traditions based upon a Law that was restricted to one group. The Gentile converts were bound to abstain from practices that were founded on universal principles from God's Law. Both sides stated their positions but placed God's directives as the priority decision-making principle.

When conflicts pop-up because of conflicting religious beliefs, the only way to resolution is to apply the universally binding principles of God's Revelation (the Holy Scriptures). Resolution will never be possible if those involved in the conflict trust their feelings, their "hero's" interpretation in religious issues, the most recent decision issued from the Synod or Conference. Resolution of religious practices and beliefs is possible only as we read, study, and accept God's biblical directives!

We are obligated to follow Inspiration's command, "Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking actual words of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)

Conflict—A personal opinion ruptured the relationship shared by Paul and Barnabas. Paul refused to take John Mark because he had proven unreliable. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark because he was his cousin. This developed into a "sharp disagreement."

Resolution—Paul and Barnabas agreed to disagree and parted company for a time. Paul and Silas went to Syria and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus. Two mission trips resulted. In later years Paul and John Mark reconciled and Paul stated that John Mark's reliability had improved and was "helpful" in Paul's ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

There are situations where the work emphasis is biblical but is not suitable or the objectives and maneuvers are not agreeable to all involved. It is inevitable that disagreements will occur. But the Christian must be determined that the number one priority is getting God's mission accomplished. Your way is not the only way, but it is YOUR way and it works for you. Give grace to others who think their way is the better way to do things and let them work THEIR way. The governing attitude is that expressed by Paul "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). If Paul felt this way when conflicted with false teachers, then he felt even better when Christ was proclaimed by a method/program that did not corrupt the sound doctrine of Christ!

Dealing with Conflict in Your Life

There are five ways that offer you a choice as to how you will deal with conflicts. You may find that various conflicts require varying responses. The critical component is one's devotion to God and a personal decision not to fuel conflict with selfish, proudful interests.

🔑 #1—MY WAY. The decision is made to assert one's personal will. There is a refusal to give-in and apologize. “I'm right, he's wrong—WHY should I apologize?” Unspoken is the attitude, “MY way is the only way.” “MY way or the highway” has alienated spouses, family members, friends, and even congregations! This attitude says that one is not concerned about others' feelings; a spirit of covetousness rules seeking to grasp selfish goals; hedonism seeks to satisfy Self.

🔑 #2—NO WAY. The decision is made to bury feelings and surrender to the aggressor. Nothing is resolved either because the aggressor is totally unreasonable or entrenched in his opinion and insensitive to reasonable requests. The conflict remains, buried but it remains, because Self is showing little concern for what initiated the conflict and its stubborn self-will is hindering resolution.

When confronted with such an attitude “just walk away.” Give God the opportunity (Romans 12:19, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”). Life is too brief and the mission opportunities are too many to surrender to Satan and become bogged down in a never-ending conflict.

🔑 #3—YOUR WAY. I yield to you because I do not want to lose our relationship. This is not a moral issue, legal issue or doctrinal issue. So, I surrender and accept that YOUR WAY will be ok. Some decide on this option but in their heart of hearts they are passive aggressive and seek to upend your way! This is a troubling reality in many relationships. Like the little child that said to his parent who told him to sit down, “I'm sitting down but, in my mind, I'm still standing up!”

🔑 #4—HALF WAY. This is the spirit of compromise (Acts 15). I give a little and you give a little and we “meet half way in the middle”! My half of the truth added to your half of the truth makes the whole truth! BUT there is the reality that compromise may not give the whole truth and that makes for poor resolution of biblical conflict.

🔑 #5—OUR WAY. This is the resolving of conflict that results from a mutual respect for and commitment to the Scriptures. If the conflict is ignited by a biblical difference, then compromise is an inadequate and damnable solution. This option shows a reciprocal respect for the integrity and goals each holds. The resolution seeks neither my way nor your way but Christ's way! The Kingdom values guide and govern resolution.

🔑 Communication Rules for Resolution

It is critical to know that the way we verbalize our positions and feelings during conflicts set the situation for possible reconciliation. There are five simple steps that we should set as our operational mode:

Focus on one issue at a time.

Resolution is impossible if one keeps injecting new issues into the discussion. Resolving one issue at a time is a challenge; resolving several at a time is impossible.

“Well, it's fine for you to talk about me leaving socks all over the house, but what about the way you clip your fingernails in public?!” This is called “cross-complaining.” It is emptying one's sack of trophy hurt rocks all at one time.

When conflicts arise, stop and look for the root issue. Deal with that issue and all others will fade away or be easier resolved.

🔑 *Deal with conflict BEFORE things reach the boiling point.*

Lucy (Peanuts fame), “If I can't be right, I'll be wrong at the top of my lungs.” She is a good illustration of one who “loses” his temper. An explosive outburst is the raw power of conflict. But when we “blow up” we have lost all control and cannot manage the situation rationally. Explosive anger discharges deadly shrapnel—unfair insults, accusations, profanity, threats, and “unwholesome speech”!

Learn the early warning signals of your anger and deal with conflict before enough pressure has built and you “blow your top”!

👉 *Open up and talk about the potential conflict.*

Do not wait until the action is made. Be fair and tell your spouse, child, parent, friend what irritates you. This will inform them, and they will know what to expect and what to avoid. We live in a world that cannot verbalize—it is all “texted” or “IM’d”. We have surrendered verbal communication to the emoji. Just as cursive writing, verbal language skills are seen as no longer essential!

Verbal expressions regarding personal opinions, tastes, gripes, positions, beliefs, etc. help reduce conflict. People cannot read your mind. Silence is at times viewed as support or at best ambiguous approval. “I’m shocked because you did not say anything about it!”

👉 *Do not exaggerate.*

We think that exaggerating our position will give us more leverage to resolve conflicts in our favor. The moment one hears “never,” “always,” or “only” immediately signals an exaggeration. The exaggerated statement is a weakening of our position. It is ineffective and untrue (a lie). Remember the old truism, “What proves too much, proves too little!”

👉 *No cheap shots.*

The more you know someone, the more you know about them. This intimacy provides ammunition to target a vulnerable point. Targeting another’s weakness is a common way of gaining leverage! “Oh, is that so? Well, you were not so smart that day when you...”

Conflict resolution is not for crushing the one in disagreement. It should provide strength and encouragement. Proverbs 27:17 speaks of conflict resolution: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Our part in conflict resolution is to make another “better” not worse!

Speaking from the heart resolving conflicts

Once a young man came to the great philosopher Socrates to be instructed in oratory. The instant the young man was introduced he began to talk. Incessantly he talked. It was a flood of words with seldom any pauses. When Socrates finally could get a word in, he said, “Young man, I will have to charge you double the fee.” “A double fee! Why?” The sage replied, “I will have to teach you two lessons. First, how to hold your tongue and, second, how to use your tongue.” 🙏

There is a truism that asks, “Do you know why God created us with two ears and one tongue?” Because He expects us to listen twice as much as we talk!

Do you recall the truism that asks: “Do you know why gave us two ears and one tongue?” Because He wants us to listen twice as much as we talk!

When it comes to personal conflicts and resolution of these volatile issues, we have instructions that far exceed Socrates. 🙏 We just need to do what God says so we are known as speaking from the heart!