

## 27. The Book of Galatians 4:12-20 (Topical)

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### ***Conflict Resolution-Part 1***

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier  
(8-11-24)

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Last week in our study we saw that when Paul came to Asia Minor (Turkey) on his first missionary journey—he became seriously ill. Some believe that he possibly contracted malaria while traveling through the low, swampy region of Pamphylia (southern coast of Asia Minor) and decided to go up into the higher and healthier elevation of Galatia and minister there for a while until his health improved (Acts 13:13–14).

There are many scholars and commentators who believe that whatever this illness was—it severely weakened Paul's eyesight and left him almost blind.

And that this was behind his statement in verses 13-15—

#### **Galatians 4:13–15 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. <sup>14</sup> And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.**

In reminding the Galatians how they initially received him and opened their hearts to him—he says to them—

*“You all remember when I came to you the first time to preach the gospel—I came to you because of my physical infirmity. But even though I came to you weak and sick—you didn't look down on me, but rather you were very kind and received me like an angel (messenger) of God— even as if Jesus Himself had come to you!”* And yet, after he left them to share the gospel in other parts of Asia Minor—a group of men known as the Judaizers came in behind Paul telling the Galatians that Paul had lied to them about the truth of the gospel (you have to be a Jew first before you can believe on Jesus).

These men convinced the Galatians that Paul wasn't a friend—he was their enemy who didn't really care about them!

This caused the Galatians to turn against Paul which broke his heart and prompted him to ask them—

#### **Galatians 4:16 (NKJV)**

**<sup>16</sup> Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?**

After working tirelessly for the Galatians to make sure they had God's truth—he comes to a point where his heart is overwhelmed with concern for them—but also somewhat by a sense of personal rejection and hurt.

The only thing that Paul had ever wanted for them was that they would know the truth and come to love Jesus as much as he did. Yet the Galatians seemed to love these lying Judaizers more than they did Paul whom the Judaizers had convinced was a phony and not a friend—effectively driving a wedge between them and Paul.

Conflict with people that Paul loved and tried to help in becoming all that God wanted them to be, but who turned on him for whatever reason—was a constant source of pain and heartache for him.

As we said last time—so often in life our deepest hurts come from those closest to us, from people we love and sacrifice the most for—but who embrace false accusations about us or misinterpret in a hyper-negative way something we have done or a mistake we have made—to the point of turning against us and even canceling us out of their lives altogether.

## I. The Reality of Conflict

One pastor had this to say on the subject—

*“Conflict is a natural part of life. Whenever people interact with one another, there is a potential for a difference in opinion that leads to conflict. Most people are able to deal with minor differences—but when major conflicts arise many people do not know what to do.*

*Many people fear conflict—some try to avoid it, others react defensively to it which leaves it unresolved and drives the anger and hurt deep inside causing what the Bible calls—“a root of bitterness which grows into the evil fruit of division and discord and in the process defiles many” (Hebrews 12:15 paraphrase). As a result, valuable relationships are damaged or destroyed, churches are split, marriages are wiped out, friendships are ended—and lawyers wind up getting rich.”*

So, as we said last time, when it comes to our interpersonal relationships conflict is inevitable—whereas conflict resolution is a learned skill that takes humility and wisdom from God’s Word to accomplish.

Before we look at *how* to resolve conflict—I’d like to first look at some of the *benefits* that can result when conflict comes our way—or in other words, what the devil intends for evil (dividing marriages, families, and churches through conflict) God can use for good—if we’re open to it!

## II. The Benefits of Conflict

One Christian author made this observation—

*“All churches are vulnerable to conflict, perhaps especially evangelical ones because of their independence and emphasis on the individual’s personal relationship to God. Conflict itself should not be seen as spiritually bad news. It is similar to conflict in marriage. The difference between good and bad marriages, like the differences between healthy and unhealthy churches, is not the amount of conflict but the way in which it is processed. Indeed, any local church that takes its mission seriously will generate all kinds of conflict—whereas the absence of conflict may be evidence of spiritual lethargy rather than health.”*

### A. Conflict gives us an opportunity to exercise humility which is the essence of Christlikeness.

#### **Genesis 13:1-9 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. <sup>2</sup>Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup>And he went on his journey from the South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup>to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup>Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for

their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. <sup>7</sup> And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. <sup>8</sup> So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we *are* brethren. <sup>9</sup> *Is* not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If *you take* the left, then I will go to the right; or, if *you go* to the right, then I will go to the left."

Lot being the nephew of Abraham should have let his uncle choose first—but instead Abraham demonstrated *humility* and esteemed Lot better than himself—

**Philippians 2:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup> *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Every time we find ourselves in a situation where we can demand our rights or '*jump in front of someone else*' but instead give the other person preference—we act like Jesus (and even become more like Jesus—Philippians 2:5-8).

**B. Conflict can make us better people by forcing us to consider the feelings and convictions of others.**

One pastor said,

*"Many Christians carry a litigious attitude into their interpersonal relationships, especially toward other members in the local church. We too quickly take offense with a brother, divide the fellowship into competing sides, and pull our membership to go elsewhere. Conflict in the church body isn't necessarily evil. It offers an opportunity to put the second commandment into practice: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Don't we want acceptance and patience from others, whatever our views? Can we refuse to others what we desire for ourselves?"*

Understand that not all conflict is bad—it can be simple having strong feelings about a course of action.

**Proverbs 27:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.

This is a great verse for Christians working side by side in a local church.

Many Christians are extremely passionate in their service for the Lord—passion for the Lord is rooted in each person's convictions. Sometimes our convictions about certain things cause us to clash with each other—and when that happens sparks fly (iron sharpens iron)!

That's okay if our commitment to the Lord and to each other is strong enough to force us to take the time to listen and to consider the other person's position.

As one author said—

*"Anything we invest time and energy in will, over time, strengthen our commitment to that thing or cause or person. This applies to any single relationship—like marriage; or a group relationship—like a church. The longer you invest yourself in that relationship, work for it and value it—the more committed you will become to it."*

The problem with 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christianity is that many people don't want to work through their conflicts with others because of their pride—which results in a "*my way or the highway*" attitude that's becoming more and more prevalent in churches.

Then there is another attitude in churches that I see today, where for many it's not that they're too 'hands on' (controlling)—but that they're too 'hands off! So, with many today they really don't want to commit themselves to a church where they can serve and sacrifice themselves for others—that isn't their objective—that isn't their mindset when coming to church.

Instead, they come to church to *be served* and not *to serve*—so opposite to the heart of Jesus who said, “...*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (Matthew 20:28)

The result is they would rather find a new church rather than invest the time, energy, sacrifice and hard work necessary to resolve conflicts and build strong committed relationships with other Christians in a local church community.

Sharing with each other (our money, resources, and our time) from what God has given to us is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian—

#### **Acts 4:32-35 (NKJV)**

<sup>32</sup> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, <sup>35</sup> and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

That brings us to the third benefit of conflict—

#### **C. Working toward resolving conflicts strengthens our commitment to one another.**

This is especially true when it comes to the commitment a man and a woman pledge to each other when they enter into marriage.

One writer mentioned a strong Christian couple who were serving the Lord in China when conflict arose:

*“Isobel Kuhn, popular author and missionary to China, was married to John, a man just as strong willed and stubborn as she was. The two had many conflicts. John, for example, had a cook in China to whom he was devoted but whom Isobel couldn't stand. Tensions grew, and Isobel sulked and stewed and finally exploded. She and John had a blazing argument. Stuffing her hat on her head, Isobel stalked from the house, through town, and onto the prairie plain boiling with rage. She said to herself, ‘I am not going to live with a man who gives a lazy servant preference over his wife.’ She walked for hours, enraged, not caring where she went. She finally returned home, but the situation remained tense although John told Isobel she could dismiss the servant. When the local church leaders visited wanting to know why the cook had been fired, John wouldn't back Isobel. And he didn't hire anyone else, sending all the domestic duties on her.*

*Other issues soon arose and for a long time the marriage was painful and stressed—but John and Isobel were committed to the Master. They were committed to personal spiritual maturity and to working and maintaining the relationship, however difficult it seemed. The two finally built a satisfying, fulfilling marriage.*

*Near the end of her life, Isobel wrote these words:*

*“I feel many modern marriages are wrecked on just sharp shoals as this. A human weakness is pointed out. The correction is resented. Argument grows bitter. Young people are not ready to forgive, not willing to endure. Divorce is too quickly seized upon as the way out. [But] to pray God to awaken the other person, to be patient until he does so—this is God's way out. And it molds the two opposite natures into one invincible whole.”*

**D. Conflict isn't limited to carnal, immature Christians and is often used by God to bring about His purposes.**

**Acts 15:36-41 (NKJV)**

<sup>36</sup> Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." <sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

➤ *Who was right—Paul or Barnabas?*

It really doesn't make much difference—perhaps both men were right on some things and wrong on other things.

That's what makes conflict resolution so difficult—the conflict is often rooted in opposing convictions where each person has legitimate points as to why they're right! *The biggest takeaway from this passage is that conflict isn't limited to carnal immature Christians—it is often rooted in a person's passion for God.*

Maturity in the Christian life is, to a large degree, not demonstrated by the absence of conflict—but in the willingness of each believer to humble themselves and do whatever is necessary to resolve the conflict—to work it out!

We know that Paul and Barnabas eventually patched things up between them.

And we also know that John Mark ultimately did succeed in the ministry and that Paul came to love, appreciate and depend on him. (2 Timothy 4:11)

Conflict even among strong Christians will happen from time to time—but Spirit-filled believers will not let the situation go unresolved for long.

**E. Conflict provides an opportunity to be a witness to the lost.**

**Acts 6:1(NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. (Food pantry)

- The *Hellenists* were Jews that lived outside of the land of Israel, spoke Greek and were more aligned with Grecian culture than with Jewish culture.
- The *Hebrews* were Jews that lived in the land of Israel, primarily spoke Hebrew and were committed to the Jewish way of life.

These two groups were in constant conflict and looked down on each other. Since the apostles were from the land of Israel the Hellenist Jews felt that the Jewish widows were being favored by them. So, here's a conflict that had the potential to divide and severely damage this young church.

The way the apostles handled this was of the utmost importance—

**Acts 6:2-7 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." <sup>5</sup> And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, <sup>6</sup> whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. <sup>7</sup> Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

You won't know this unless you've studied the passage—but all seven names are Greek, meaning that each of these men chosen to distribute food to the widows were Hellenist Jews!

Because this situation was handled with wisdom and sensitivity toward those who were offended, a potentially divisive issue was defused, and the gospel continued to go forth—even to the point where many priests were saved.

If conflict is dealt with in humility, love and selflessness—the results will be that unbelievers will take notice and be drawn to Jesus.

One Pastor/Author talking about the conflict in Acts 6 and how it was handled said:

*"Considering all that could have gone wrong, everyone involved gets high marks.*

- *Those with the complaint did the right thing (made the need known and trusted the solution of the apostles)*
- *Those of the other party (Hebrews) did the right thing (recognized that others (Hellenists) had need and trusted the solution of the apostles)*
- *The seven chosen did the right thing (accepted the call to unglamorous service)*
- *The apostles did the right thing (responded to the need without distracting themselves from their central task)*

*Because this situation was handled with wisdom and sensitivity to those who were offended, a potentially divisive issue was defused, and the gospel continued to go forth - even to the point where many priests were being saved."*

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