

James 4:1-12
Conflict & Humility

I. Intro

Are you good at conflict resolution?

How would those who have experienced conflict with you describe you? As a fighter and a quarreler or as humble? I'm going to take a wild stab here and say that for most of us, we are not good at conflict resolution... In fact... if we were to ask people to describe us it wouldn't be pretty...

Why? (Let's do crowd participation here) Why are we not good at confronting each other?

We learned it the wrong way - our parents. We never learned how to do it. We don't want to change. We don't understand the gospel.

Over the last several weeks James has been dealing a lot with our interaction with one another.

Brandon talked about James 3 and the danger of the tongue. He challenged us to use our tongue to speak life and not curses.

Last week John talked about how truth with humility and love grows in a heart being captured by the cross.

And now James is going to press even further into our interactions with one another.

Today we are going to discover that

Since our greatest conflict has been resolved, Christians should humbly pursue the resolution of conflict.

So here is what we are going to do today. We are going to look at two helps to conflict resolution.

Then we will talk through what hinders us when it comes to conflict resolution. And close by talking about how to approach conflict.

Two helps, what hinders us, and how to approach it.

1. Two helps to engage in conflict resolution.

When Dondra and I do pre-marital, one of the sessions we have is conflict resolution. Why? Because in our lives we are going to have conflict. We are sinners and when two volatile broken people talk to one another, there is going to be conflict. So we to learn how to engage when things get broken.

Just to offer a bit of background. When I got married, if there was a scale... 1 being awful at conflict resolution and 10 being Jesus... I was a negative 3. I would avoid conflict no matter the cost, until I was so mad, I would explode on Dondra. In God's providence about 8 years ago I went through a pastoral assessment and 3 men recognized this issue in my life and challenged me to get help. Later that week, unbeknownst to one of the members at our church that this had just gone down, Dayna called me and said, I've been trying to figure out where I can serve in the church and I've been struggling with that. I work at Edward Jones and I train our people how to have difficult conversations and I was wondering if you would be interested in some coaching on how to do that?

Today James offers us many, but I would point out two helps... two very practical things you can practice when it comes to conflict. You see as Christians, we should be those who seek to resolve conflict, but not cross over into fighting and quarreling. So... help #1.

James 4:11-12

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Help #1 - Do not speak evil against one another.

When there is tension? When there is frustration? When there is disappointment? What is usually our first step?

To speak evil against the perpetrator.

One commentator said there are several kinds of evil-speaking.

They may all be ranked under two headings: whispering and backbiting.

Whispering = a private defamation of a brother or sister among those who think well of them.

Backbiting = a public defamation of a brother or sister.

Both may be done in many ways, not only by false accusations, but also by divulging others' secret evils, by increasing or aggravating their faults, by depraving their good actions by supposing they have sinister aims, by mentioning what is culpable or deserving blame, and by suppressing their worth. -Crossway Commentary

Help #1 - Do not speak evil against one another, but rather go to one another.

This is so simple but so hard.

Now, it's important that when we address one another we do it with help #2.

Help #2 - Approach one another with the right mindset.

Hear these verses again...

James 4:11-12

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Here's the mindset most of us go into conflict resolution with...

I have all the answers. I'm right and they are wrong. I have all the information. I need to convict them. I need to punish them. I will win!

My friends this is not the way to approach conflict. James reminds us here that God alone is the giver of the law and the judge.

I would argue that what James is saying here is you can either approach someone as the judge and executioner or as a humble brother.

The right mindset is to be a learner and not a winner.

When we think we know everything... we approach with a mindset to win.

When we think we are the judge... we approach with a mindset to learn.

When Dayna was training me she taught me to approach conflict with 3 concepts:

1. Their actions make complete sense to them.
2. They have information I need
3. I have information they need

So, let's hear James' exhortation to us... Don't speak evil, go to the person. And change your mindset from winning to learning.

Now... there are some of you who are thinking... say amen. That's all I need right there. I just need a couple of tools and I can fix this.

But without the rest of what James says... my practical steps are not going to help you at all!

You see there is a reason we all want to be right. There is a reason we approach conflict wrong. There is a reason our conflicts could be better described as fights and quarrels...

The reason is there is a hindrance...

2. The hindrance to healthy conflict resolution isn't our skills, it's our heart.

James 4:1-4

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Here's the problem. We live a life of self-pleasing. Our comfort, our convenience, and our control are more important than anybody else's. Our needs are more important than the people around us. We live in an entitlement world. And that world tells us to care about us.

And when you live like that... James has strong language for you...

He call you an adulterer and an enemy of God.

Listen, **sinful human conflict is rooted in spiritual adultery.**

Adultery is giving the love that you promised to someone, to someone else.

We give the love that is meant for God, to what the world tells us - the love of ourselves.

That's why we all stink at conflict. We love ourselves too much.

We avoid people to protect ourselves or we crush people to promote ourselves. (2x)

James tells us that God is jealous for the love that is his.

The hindrance is we are committed to ourselves and it produces contempt, covetousness, and pride.

Do you see that hindrance in your life? The hindrance of loving yourself? It shows itself in many ways.

Here... let's do a really quick inventory:

-Are you aware of other faults above your own?

-When you see other people fail do you feel disdain for them and pride for yourself?

-Do you avoid or criticize those who criticize you?

Be careful. This stuff is very sneaky. If you don't think this is you, you might be deceiving yourself.

Because the fruit of quarrels and fighting is your heart, it's not your method. (2x)

But there is a solution... James tells us that God offers us more grace.

3. How should we approach conflict?

Let me ask you another question... how does God approach conflict with us?

We have wronged God. We are his enemies. We are hostile towards Him.

He is the ultimate judge. He is the one who has every right to convict.

But what does God do? Instead of taking His outrage on us, He humbles himself to come into our world and pours our judgment on himself. Has that moved your soul?

That the one person who deserved to confront you, who deserved to convict you, choose to convict Himself instead!? Why should we be defensive when all the charges against us have been dismissed by the real judge?

Romans 5:8 says while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ humbled himself

Look at how simple James makes this for us:

James 4:6-8

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

This seems difficult. But this is the picture of Jesus.

Jesus humbled himself. Jesus resisted the Devil, Jesus submitted himself to God.

And when this moves our hearts from ourselves, that’s when real transformation will begin.

You see the only way to approach conflict without a desire to win, is to see that the greatest conflict we face has been resolved. And this allows us to be humble people.

That’s why James declares verse 9 and 10

⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

He is saying, acknowledge your brokenness. Weep over your sin. Mourn over the cost it took for your conflict to be resolved. And this will lead you to humility. It will lead you to be gracious to others, to confront them in love and grace.

II. Conclusion

James gives us two helps towards conflict... don’t speak evil & change your attitude from winning to learning. He reminds us there is a hindrance however, how hearts. If we struggle with conflict resolution it is because of an internal issue, not a method. And then he challenges us to be humble. To recognize that Jesus resolved our greatest conflict at an ultimate cost. The judge became the one judged.

So... Since our greatest conflict has been resolved, Christians should humbly pursue the resolution of conflict.