

May 6, 2018

(Master Plan Series)

“Crucial Confrontations”, Selected texts from Ephesians and Proverbs

Whether it is in marriage, family, friendships, or any other human relationships, we all have to face the dynamic of conflict: either confronting or being confronted by others. We might face this conflict in many different ways, from direct avoidance to outright hostility. Christ Himself dealt with conflict throughout His ministry and ultimately His death. From Scripture’s teachings, how are we as Christians to deal with this issue of open rebuke in our real lives?

Three Facts About Conflict

I. God Uses Conflict

Ephesians 4:26 commands us to “Be angry and do not sin...”, and Proverbs 27:5,6 tells us: “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted...” Although often painful, the experience of conflict can open us up in a good way... exposing us to truth that can help us grow as individuals and in relationships. Resolving conflict, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can stretch and change us as we carefully listen to others or lovingly confront them.

As we learned previously, the Hebrew word for the creation of Eve, Adam’s mate, was “etzer kenegdo”, meaning his “suitable companion” or literally his “opposite/according to” spouse. This complementary relationship in marriage creates the possibility for deep, personal, unlimited change/growth when conflicts arise...with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

II. Conflict Can Escalate

Conflict itself is not bad...God uses conflict. Conflict is almost always an opportunity for growth. Yet we must be aware that conflict can become intense in unhealthy ways, becoming dangerous as it escalates when we just talk about things rather than solve the problem. In Proverbs 17:14, Solomon says, “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out”. To stop: you pray for the truth, acknowledge the truth to yourself and to the other, speak gently (Prov.15:1), and back off as you continue praying for the real cause of this conflict (e.g., fear, control) instead perhaps of the issue itself you are discussing.

III. Our Most Powerful Tool for Dealing with Conflict Is the Gospel

Instead of more self esteem, a bag of techniques, or even a bunch of Bible verses, we need the moment by moment experience of the transforming forgiveness of the Gospel. More than just getting us into Heaven, the Gospel IS the Christian life on earth. **Its pattern is clear: We see our sin (acknowledge it). We name our sin (own it). We turn from our sin to God (repent). God Himself lovingly exchanges our sin with His forgiveness (redeems us). We share that Grace with others (our witness).**

As we know our failings & experience His continual grace, we can find healing in our conflicts with others. We will be more able to listen, see, and own our own shortcomings; bring them to God; experience His forgiveness, and extend that grace to others by ending hostilities and consequences. All our relationships can be molded by the Gospel pattern in our lives, if we allow it. God does use conflict, and He uses it best when we respond with His Gospel pattern.

Discussion Questions:

1. In general, what is your manner of facing rebuke to or from others?
2. Has there ever been a time when you personally learned truth from conflict?
3. How do we build truthful relationships that can endure/thrive through conflict?
4. What is the role of love in conflict resolution?
5. To what extent do you live the “Gospel pattern”? How important is it to you?
6. Do you believe, as Pastor John preached, that we receive grace for the cost of confession? Why is it so important that we see our sin first to find and give grace?