

Christ Community Covenant Church
'Finding Hope in Conflict'
Pastor Gloria Merritt – September 14, 2014

SHOW VIDEO: "When People Don't Get Along"

Slides that show people's faces with these phrases: Can't even remember just how it startedWhy can't they listen? ... I don't know if I can forgive It's their problem ... They owe me a big apology ... The point is, I'm right ... I've never been so hurt ... It's them, not me ... She knows exactly what she did ... They lied about me ... No one likes me ... I'm not part of the group ... If only they would listen ... That's just how it is ... They're all against me ... My mind is made up ... God knows I'm right ... Someday they'll need my help ...

Different sides. Different stories. Conflict unresolved. <Done>

Conflict. Like the video just said, we often don't even know how it got started. It happens so quickly sometimes. But, how does this relate to a sermon series about hope? Well, I believe that conflicts can be some of the most discouraging things we experience in this life. For me, when I'm in the midst of conflict, I need hope. Like Scott said last week, I need more than just a hopeful thought of, "I hope this turns out okay." Or, "I hope I get along with everybody, I hope everybody likes me."

Last week Scott told us about 3 things we can depend on when having hope, and in the area of conflict we can know and believe and have the assurance:

- 1) That in conflict, my heavenly Father, the God of my past – has already reconciled me to Himself, He is a God of reconciliation. He is the original resolver of conflict.
- 2) When in conflict, I need the hope that the Holy Spirit is with me in this present moment to soften my heart and the hearts of others. He continues to work on transforming me, especially when I cooperate and run to Him!
- 3) In conflict, I need the hope that Christ's triumphant power will be with me in the future no matter how long I have to wait to see a conflict resolved, or even harder, in the possibility that I may not live to see it resolved! I need HOPE, not just wishful thinking.

That's why we're talking about conflict in this series.

Before I go any further, let's pause and pray.

First we need to clear something up. Is conflict sinful? No. It is not. Turn to Matthew 10:34. Here Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'" Do you remember hearing this scripture? Jesus initiated conflict by coming into our world to challenge sin and evil and to overcome it. It's the *ultimate* conflict. It is true that Christ came to bring peace — peace between the believer and God, and peace among humans. Yet the inevitable result of Christ's coming is conflict — between Christ's children and the devil's children. This conflict can occur even between members of the same family. Maybe you're well acquainted with this kind of conflict between family members who know Jesus and those who do not.

Conflicts are an inevitable part of life. People come from different backgrounds, wake up in bad moods, have bad days, don't feel well, and have negative experiences. Those things can spark conflict. But what if the conflict gets much more serious than that? What if we continually find ourselves in conflict with our spouse, or a child? What if we are at continual odds with people we work with or worship with? We see evidence of this all around us when these "irreconcilable differences" lead to divorce, or estrangement, or to getting fired from a job, or to making us feel we must leave our church or a small group or organization. We just don't do well with conflict. We don't know how to handle it. We avoid it. Instead we choose things like not speaking to someone for a very long time, we choose to hold a grudge, or to allow the conflict to take such a strong hold in our lives that we can't get past it. Some people thrive on conflict, but I think that most of us avoid it, and strongly dislike it, or the confrontation necessary to repair the conflict.

While conflict itself isn't sinful, it is often our response to it that gets so messed up! What we want is to become Christ-like and mature as we deal with conflict. We don't want our conflicts to lead us to disunity in our families, or our organizations, or our church. And, that's where we need to find **hope**.

A reason that conflict resolution is so difficult is that it's uncomfortable. We don't like to admit that we might be wrong or to do what it might take to right the situation if we are wrong. Those who are best at resolving conflicts are those who understand what scripture teaches about resolving conflict and do so out of obedience to God. Scripture has a LOT to teach us in this area. I've found more than 75 different scriptures that we could look at, but obviously there isn't time! This tells me that God knows we need help in our relationships! He doesn't leave us without hope or without help.

Let's begin with Colossians 3, starting with verse 12. Let's turn there and read.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

If we lived out those words, can you imagine how many conflicts could be avoided? [Re-read a few of them.] This past week, I heard a minister talk about John 1:14 where it says that, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." That is supposed to be true in our lives – the Word is supposed to become flesh, our flesh. The Word of God isn't true in our lives until we live it. It is not just supposed to be read daily, memorized in our heads and held in our hearts, it is to be demonstrated in our flesh." Isn't that powerful? That has been said another way in James 1, "be doers of the Word, and not just hearers only."

Let's talk about --

Reasons we have conflicts:

1) We are easily offended, easily annoyed, easily irritated, quick to get angry.

Proverbs 20:3 says, "It is to a person's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel."

I Corinthians 13:5, Love doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, (from The Message)

2) Our pride can lead to a jealous spirit, and we want to get even. We think: "Well, if this person caused me grief, or inconvenience, or trouble, or you-name-it, then that's what they deserve in return."

Romans 12 gives an answer for that starting in verse 17: Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

That scripture very pointedly reminds us that we are to leave many of these conflicts in God's hands, allowing him to deal with the repayment.

3) We are too quick to speak, too slow to listen and too quick to get angry.

How many conflicts happen because of something we said?

James 1:19 Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Proverbs 18:13 The person who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

I found a couple of short video segments from the comedian Ken Davis to illustrate how conflict springs from faulty communication. **<Ken Davis videos>**

Anybody been there, done that?

Ways to resolve conflict:

There are other things we could mention about why we have conflicts, but I'd like to move on and spend some time discussing what Scripture teaches about resolving conflicts. A dear friend reminded me this past week that conflict is almost always the Catalyst for Change. I like that. Perhaps we can view conflict as something that God can use to change US. So often we think, "God change that other person. That person is such a jerk!" What if our first response to conflict was, "Lord Jesus, how do you want me to respond to this? How do you want to change me?"

One thing we can do is to overlook an offense. Overlooking an offense is the antithesis of being easily offended or annoyed or irritated. It requires some self-control and some maturity. It's demonstrated by giving people the benefit of the doubt, by thinking well of others, by knowing that people mean well. Proverbs 19:11 says, "A person's wisdom gives him patience; it is **to his glory** to overlook an offense."

Sometimes this means something on an even bigger scale. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:7. Paul here is speaking of lawsuits. "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers." When Paul says that we have been **completely defeated already** it could mean that our actions are motivated by greed, or selfishness, or retaliation instead of love and forgiveness. Does this passage mean that a lawsuit is never permissible in God's plan? I just want to say that we should be very prayerful, and very careful, and very sure that God is leading us in that direction if a conflict of business or finances or estate occurs.

One passage of Scripture that we can't forget when resolving conflict is Matthew 18:15-16 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

This scripture is dealing with the kind of conflict that is major – often one that includes legal matters. It's dealing with action-worthy types of things. It's dealing with the kinds of things that have put strain on a relationship, and only you can know what that is. But an important statement here is, "just between the two of you". Here's where we err a lot. We cannot neglect the fact that gossip or back-biting is like gasoline to a fire in conflict. It's our tendency to process our problems with other people before we ever approach the one we're having conflict with. Venting our anger to someone else is not always healthy, because venting our anger can reinforce it, give it an opportunity to fester, boil, and gain more weight than the situation deserves. The best venting we can do is on our knees! God knows and sees it anyway, so why not discuss it with Him? Then, allow God to help you approach the person you're having a conflict with and to give you the wisdom you need in handling it.

But, I do recommend this – getting advice or counsel from a trusted confidant in the midst of conflict. Sometimes that comes in the form of counseling. It can be very helpful to process with an outside party for the purpose of getting wise counsel in handling tough situations.

The goal in resolving conflict should be restoration and reconciliation, remembering that that is God's heart for his children. The goal is not to prove who was right, not to get back at someone, or not to avoid the difficulty of change.

So much of Scripture speaks of being proactive in relationships, not reactive. Scripture is both preventative and prescriptive. Again, this word must become our **flesh**.

We heard Scott mention earlier an opportunity that we have here at 4Cs this next Sunday and take

another step in the process that we call Navigate. At this time, I would like to invite Bruce Backer, a member of the Council and the Vitality team to come and share some more information with us.

<Bruce Backer's thoughts>

Thank you, Bruce. I hope that this process of committing to live out these Biblical principles in our church will also carry over into our family and friend relationships. Having a Relational Covenant in our families is a really, really good idea.

This whole area of Finding Hope in Conflict is something I really need to grow in. It's been my tendency to avoid confrontation and to let the conflict linger and have its way. There are parts of my life that still need to be surrendered. But, I am hopeful that our Heavenly Father will bring reconciliation, and I am hopeful that the Holy Spirit's power is transforming me, and I am hopeful that Christ's power is already at work in the future, no matter how long it takes.

Before we take the offering, let's take a moment and seek God together. Let's ask Him for hope in our relationships, and in our conflicts. If listening to God in prayer is something new for you, I encourage you to take a risk. Believe that God may put some thoughts right there in front of you when you ask him. Let's pray...

Lord, as we seek your heart in this area of resolving conflict... We acknowledge that we really need your help when it comes to getting along with others and when it comes to resolving our conflicts... Right now, Lord, I want to pause and be quiet before You. I want to place before you a conflict that I'm having and ask you what to do... what step do you want me to take with this person or with this difficult situation?... I trust you to help me. Thank you, Lord.

And, Heavenly Father, we now give our tithes and offerings to you, also trusting that you will multiply it for your kingdom's use, allowing it to be of good wherever it is used. Thank you, Lord.

As the ushers begin to receive the offering, I just want to say that this closing song will be new to most of us. It was sung last week during communion, but it is a beautiful song of encouragement and hope, a song that reminds us of who God is and that we belong to him.

BENEDICTION:

So, if you say you love someone, really love them! Be devoted to them. Honor them above yourselves. Be joyful in hope, patient when things go wrong, and be faithful in prayer. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Be hopeful in God, and go in peace!