

Collab #6: Conflict and Clashes

How comfortable are you in conflict?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Uncomfortable

Comfortable

When there is conflict, do you retreat or press in?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Avoidant

Pursuant

CONFLICT IS PART OF REALITY

Conflict is part of the human condition since the Fall of man.

1. Adam and Eve demonstrate the roots of conflict when they break their relationship with God, blame each other, and refuse to accept personal responsibility. Genesis 3:12-13
2. Cain demonstrates the power of conflict when he kills his brother. Gen. 4

Conflict is purposefully set in motion BY GOD as a “necessary ingredient” of confronting conflict in a broken world.

1. Spiritual conflict is set in motion between the “seed of the serpent” and “seed of the woman” that plays itself out in the tensions between the godly and ungodly. Genesis 3:15, 4:23-24.
2. Human conflict is set into motion as God sets “conflict” in the equation of the marriage relationship due to the curse (which, could be a starting point for all human relationships). Genesis 3:16
3. God, even deliberately, sets up internal conflict within the heart of the believer. Romans 7:15-19, James 4:5-6

Good News!: All of this conflict has God's loving purposes on it...it forces us to deal with the realities of sin that we would otherwise ignore, and leads us to cry out for grace, and grow in our knowledge of the Lord (James 4:6, Romans 7:7-13, Hebrews 12:25-27). Conflict seems to be like physical pain—it hurts and no one enjoys it, but it works as a signal that there is something wrong that needs to be made right. CONFLICT ISN'T BAD...IT'S PAINFUL, BUT NOT BAD.

SATAN'S PURPOSE FOR CONFLICT: DIVISION, DESTRUCTION, DECEPTION

The process of destructive conflict on a team

1. "I'm right"! - Our flesh yearns for self-justification but we are most blind to our own failings, most easily proud, and less teachable. In the church, this self-righteousness gets wrapped up in the claim that we are defending "God's righteousness", when it is mostly about our own sense of being right. But there is always an underside of fear.
2. Failure to Flee Idolatry - Our faith can shift from the Living Christ to the gifts, plans, and expectations of self and others. The result is that the power goes out of life. Along with this shift from grace to works, we can create our own reality of how to motivate and accomplish goals through guilt rather than love.

We often spend our time praying around protecting our idols, rather than having a broken heart over our sin and expecting God to freely bless us through Christ. UNLESS WE WRESTLE HERE, WE WILL BECOME DESTRUCTIVE PEOPLE IN CONFLICT.

3. Differences Become Critical - We refuse to see others through the eyes of faith. Our secret doubts of each other rise to the surface in a prominent way. We begin to identify people by their sins instead of by the promise of Christ in them. Feelings of superiority and “being right” begin to impress themselves on our consciousness. If we see ourselves as clearly wrong, we will repent and exercise humility. If we see ourselves as clearly right, we tend to judge, kill and destroy.

4. Fear Turns to Condemnation - “I’m right/superior” has an underside of fear. That fear begins to drive us. If we define others by their sin/failure, then we begin to define ourselves by our sin/failure. 1 John 4:18-19.

Unless we are dealing with these things, attitudes harden and differences become unbridgeable. This begins to express itself in gossip and judgmentalism. Feelings are growing cold in “love”, but hot in “judgment”. Begin fixating on other person’s weaknesses. Every action now acts as a catalyst for further hardening of the attitudes. Bitterness sets in. There is no forgiveness in the end and the other person is demonized. James 3:13-16

5. Public Exposure and Clash – someone must pay! - The issues break out in the open. Figurative punches are thrown. People fire volatile rounds of accusation at one another. Peacemakers sometimes come along and try to hold the bodies up and keep things going, but there might not be an attempt at Matthew 18. The wounds increase, the gossip builds, and the self-righteousness hardens. We focus on what we are owed and Matthew 18:15-20 is side-stepped.

6. Excommunication of Each Other - The team breaks up. A sense of hopelessness about the Gospel and the power of the Kingdom of God sets in, often followed by a spiritual despair. In the end, the conclusion is that the Gospel doesn’t work.

SYMPTOMS & PRIME CONDITIONS FOR A PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ATTACK

First, a few facts: Spiritual forces exist. They are not everywhere and not responsible for every bad circumstance. But they do exist. Satan is not equal to God and does NOT have absolute power. But he can exhibit powers to destroy, but God can always use that destruction in a positive way for His purposes. The devil usually shows up subtly. He doesn't often say "Here I Am!". He is much more sophisticated & crafty (Gen. 3:1).

Examples:

1. Unaware of your own presumption - You are functionally unaware that you have sin in your life and that Satan will pull your chain and seek to devour you. You think your own commitment and zeal is enough.

For instance, Peter was so convinced he was right, but he was completely wrong about the expectations for following Jesus. Jesus had to rebuke him (Matthew 16:23). Jesus warns Peter that a battle is coming (Luke 22:31-34) and Satan is going to attack. Peter is unaware of his vulnerability and thinks he is completely committed.

We go into a mission or ministry with pre-set notions of how we are going to utilize our gifts, understand the needs, and communicate the Gospel. When we run into barriers, we are thrown into doubt. One evidence of our presumption is a lack of prayer: Luke 22:40-46. Peter was far more committed to HIMSELF than he knew. When it became evident that Jesus was surrendering to the hands of men, Peter panicked, and deep fears emerged from his heart and led his actions. Luke 22:54-60. Despair followed. Luke 22:61-62

2. Fall into Despair - When things don't work out, you blame someone else. Even if you accept responsibility, you are not dealing with the pride, presumption and lack of humility. This will lead you to despair. "I'll never get it right". "Others will never get it right". "God doesn't seem to care". This is full blown spiritual warfare & an attack by Satan.

3. Unresolved Mental and Emotional Confusion - Some is ordinary and helpful, because it makes us teachable. But deep confusion that is perpetually unresolved and doesn't lead back to the Gospel and the hope of God (Romans 15:13) shows that Satan has a hold.

4. A Troubled Conscience - The troubled conscience is a result of Satan grabbing our pride and using it to defeat us in sin. The problem can be that unless we learn to deal with the reality of this, we can keep giving him the handle. In extreme form, Satan says, "Take your life." Compare Judas Iscariot and Peter. Both could have ended their lives in the same place, except that Jesus prays for Peter and later he repents.

5. Other examples: Divisions (James 4:1-10), Self-Righteousness, Physical Sickness (2 Cor. 12), Persecution (Rev. 12), Complacency.

God's Solution: The Gospel

1. Focus Your Faith on the Gospel

Gospel facts against Satan:

- Though Satan wants to claim us as His own, we are Jesus'.
- Because of the atonement, it is Jesus' legal, lawful right to claim us.
- He intercedes on our behalf and never loses a case.
- All the accusation Satan fires ultimately fail because they are directed against the Christ's blood and righteousness on our behalf. Rom. 8:33-34

Gospel facts that help in team conflict:

- put on faith and define the other person/party by what Christ says about them rather than the conflict.
- remember that the Spirit is committed to work God's love in us forever, even when others shake our idols. Ephesians 4:30-32.

2. Humble Yourself

- a humble heart drives away Satan because it leaves him with no handle to use as leverage. 1 Peter 5:6ff, James 4:7-10
- humility points us to the simple strategy of standing firm in the faith by lowering ourselves before God and claiming the blood of Christ over us. able.
- willingness to persevere.

- Believing the Gospel requires true humility because it means we admit we have nothing to boast in except Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:27ff, Gal. 6:14
- a humbling of the heart also gives us freedom to learn God's ways of advancing His kingdom:
 - put aside the self-confident, fleshly agenda
 - rely on the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer
 - serve others with God's grace in word and deed
- embrace weakness and suffering of Christ to advance the God's rule in the hearts of men.
- the result is a boldness that allows us to follow Christ and face whatever opposition may arise, with a humble confidence that God will triumph. (See Peter in Acts 1 & 2; 1 Peter 4:2ff)

3. Cry Out for Grace

- recognize that you can't love on your own.
- God promises to meet us in our need.
- Let the conflicts drive us to the promises of God, which are freely given. James 1:2-5

4. Identify and Reject Idols (Approval, power, comfort, control, pleasure).

- don't deny that idols exist. It is in all of our flesh.
- don't deny their power. The child of God has the freedom to acknowledge this and reject them.
- don't be afraid to talk about other's idols.

5. Focus on Foundational Unity in Christ

6. Repent Frequently Apologize, confess sins, listen, affirm. These are crucial to keeping the unity of the body.

7. Engage in Constructive Conflict

What does that look like?

- willingness to be in pain.
- willingness to be uncomfortable.
- willingness to persevere.