

Dealing with Conflict in a Gospel Centered Way

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and turn to the book of Galatians, Galatians chapter 2.

If you're visiting with us, you can take that black Bible and a chair in front of you, pull that out, go towards the back, go to page 147, 147.

Galatians chapter 2. Today, before we start in the book of Acts, God willing, next week, I want to do a message dealing with conflict in a gospel-centered way.

Anyway, this message comes straight from the gospel-centered life, the notes that I used to teach the adult class a few weeks ago.

I went through nine or ten weeks of that study. And I told you I wanted to take one of those weeks and do that today. It was a great study that we went through, plus it gives me more time to be able to prepare for the book of Acts.

[1:16] It's just been really tough to do that. Thank you for praying for me. Galatians 2, I'm going to read verses 11 through 16.

But when Cephas, that is Peter, came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. When they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, If you being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

We are Jews by nature, not sinners from among the Gentiles. Nevertheless, knowing that man is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law, since by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

[2:49] The title of the article was, The Middle East Conflict, A Thousand and One Alliances. It's by Claude Salani, if I'm saying his last name right.

He starts in like this, Trying to explain the Middle East to someone who's not familiar with the intricacies of its alliance policies can seem so unreal that often the fables of the 1001 knights may seem more probable.

The Middle East is in constant turmoil, perpetual anger, increasing hate and growing violence.

Recently that anger, hate and violence have taken the region to a new dimension of horror.

And then he goes into explaining ISIS, which you all are familiar with. He says later on, The dual conflicts, the war in Syria, and the absence of peace in Iraq, have given rise to a plethora of alliances, counter-alliances and counter-counter-alliances.

And then the process rendering the age-old adage, That the enemy of my enemy is my friend, somewhat irrelevant. Sometimes the enemy of my enemy is now my enemy, and sometimes not.

[4:11] That's confusing. Towards the end of the article he says this, To paraphrase a former French ambassador in the region, Quote, If you think you understand the problems of the Middle East, it means it was badly explained to you.

Conflict. Did you have one when you're on your way to church this morning? Oh yes. And then you put on your nice face, right? Between countries, there's conflicts.

Within countries, there's conflicts. Peoples, clans, tribes. Within a community. A company. An employer, an employee.

Between neighbors. Your neighbor across the street. Oh, yeah. Family members. Cousins, brothers, sisters. Parents to child.

Child to parent. Conflict. It happens. In the Bible. There's a lot of conflict in the Bible.

[5:25] And in our passage today, you see conflict. So that's why, this message, dealing with conflict in a gospel-centered way.

How do we deal with conflict? The way God wants us to. Here you have a conflict between Peter and Paul. Peter was eating and hanging out with Gentile people.

His Gentile homies. But when some of the brothers, Jewish brothers, they came to him, he totally backed off from the Gentiles.

He stopped eating with them. I've never seen this guy before in my life. I don't know who he is.

Conflict. Conflict. Even here in our passage, conflict happens.

How do we deal with this? First, what happens as I grow in my Christian life? Should happen. More awareness of God's holiness and my sinfulness through the conviction of the Holy Spirit as I read my Bible and live in community with other Christians.

[6:36] Individual as well as coupled with community. Which by the way, that's why it's so important to become a member of a church. Membership in the church is so important. So you can connect with people.

Not just to become a member of a church, but so you can show that you want to connect with people and you really connect with people. This is what should happen in our Christian life.

As we're reading our Bibles, we're living and committing with each other. with a growing awareness of God's holiness, a growing awareness of my sin, and the result is I have a deeper appreciation and love for Jesus because He's the mediator.

He's my sacrifice. As I have a growing awareness of God's holiness and a growing awareness of my sinfulness and how so far I'm away from God's holiness, the cross of Christ looms larger and larger that I am loved and embraced by God through Jesus alone.

I'm credited with His righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus. His grace has worked for me. It's there. It's at the cross and it's larger and larger and it's so, so glorious and it's so sweet.

[7:58] It's awesome. This is why we need to remind ourselves of the Gospel all the time.

Constantly reminding ourselves. Nourishing our minds on biblical truth.

To know, to see, to savor the holy, righteous character of God as well as identify, admit, and feel the depth of our sinfulness and God's great love for us in Jesus Christ.

And we do this because this is the life God wants for us. This is the way God wants us to live. A life of transforming joy, love, and hope.

He wants that for us. So, growing in the Gospel means seeing more of God's holiness and more of my sin.

And because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we need not fear seeing God as He really is. Or admitting how broken we really are. That's okay. That's what He wants.

[9:07] And then we run to the cross and we say, I don't deserve this. I'm broken. I'm awful in your sight. And God says, yes, that's exactly where I want you because that's why I had to die. That's why I had to send my son.

That's what He wants you to be. Admit that you're a loser. Our hope is not in our goodness. Our hope is not in the vain expectation that God will compromise His standards and grade on a curve. If you remember that in class. If you're at home school, you don't know what that is. Grade on a curve.

100% is here. Everybody takes the test. Everybody, everyone does about here, down. So what the professor does, 100% is 100%.

Professor says, okay, now 85% is 100%. So he grades on a curve. Now everyone's grade goes, pushes up. Awesome, I got 100% even though I got a 60%.

[10:07] You know, something like that. Right? God doesn't work that way. God doesn't grade on a curve. This standard is perfection. And as someone told me in Jerome on Friday, I can't meet that standard.

Exactly. That's why you needed Jesus to come, to live for you, and to die on your behalf. And then He also said to me, but why would God do that? I didn't even deserve it.

I said, exactly. Exactly. You don't deserve it. That's why it's called grace. Undeserved favor.

Rather, what we do, we rest in Jesus as our perfect Redeemer. That's what we rest in. If I am in union with Jesus Christ, put it this way, if you are in union with Jesus Christ, the Father says, Lord, with you, I am well pleased.

Because He's in the Son. Ellen, with you, I am well pleased. Daniel, with you, I am well pleased. Vicente, with you, I am well pleased. Because you're in my Son.

[11 : 21] I see my Son. He's lived for you. He's died for you. You're in my Son. I love you. Christ, and Christ alone. That is the Gospel. Not your merits.

Not your goodness. Not the goodness of anybody else who's ever lived or died. It's Jesus and Jesus alone. Solus Christus is what the Reformers said.

Latin for Christ alone. Because I've been credited with Jesus' righteousness. He's paid my ransom. I have forgiveness of sins.

So the Gospel brings renewal to our relationship with God and our relationship with others. And the one thing we can be confident of when we have a relationship with others is conflict.

We won't always agree. Especially if you put two Baptists in a room together. Oh my goodness, they're not going to agree. A little Baptist humor there. Listen though.

[12 : 27] But, if the Gospel is not affecting the way we deal with conflict, then it's probably not touching us very deeply. If the Gospel of Jesus does not affect the way we're treating each other, then we have a superficial understanding of the Gospel.

It means we merely have the head knowledge of the Gospel. It means it doesn't affect or effects the daily practical stuff of life.

And what is more practical than relationships? I mean, that's practical. I mean, you have a relationship in everything. So think.

Think about a recent conflict. Maybe I'll wait to the church service. Recent conflict with your spouse. family member. Family member. Work associate.

Parent, child, friend. From our behavior, we fall into one of two categories.

[13 : 40] We're either an attacker or a withdrawer. How we handle conflict and how we deal with conflict, we will fall into one of two categories. We will either be an attacker or a withdrawer.

One or the other, although many of us can respond in both ways, depending on the situation. So one is an attacker. What is a withdrawer?

An attacker. Someone who's on the offensive. They have a high value of justice. The person's focused more on whose rights are wrong.

So what are signs that you're an attacker? You deal with your anger by venting. You argue your case passionately.

You ask, well how do you know? Or, can you prove that? You fight until the fight is over. Until you're the last one standing. You cross examine like a lawyer.

[14 : 48] Winning the argument is way more important to you than that relationship. than loving the person in that relationship. And you can be so good in your cross examination that you can actually turn the argument to focus on the other person.

Even if it began with you as the focal point. So you can turn it back on the person. Wait a second. It's about you. Oh, it's about you. That's an attacker.

What about someone who's a withdrawer? A withdrawer. Defensive. They avoid. They ignore conflicts. Silence. Apathetic. Passive aggressive.

What are signs of someone who's like this? They deal with their anger by suppressing. They have opinions but they keep it to themselves. Let's just try and keep the peace.

They ask, do we have to talk about this now? Or does it matter? They avoid a fight rather than win a fight.

[15 : 56] They sometimes actually physically leave an argument because they've got to get some space. So some of you are reading as I'm hearing it, and you're like, oh yeah, I did that yesterday.

I do that this morning. I'm totally like that. I do that. Wow. So we fall in one of two categories. Now these are natural responses.

We have friction in our relationships. But they're not biblical responses. They're not gospel-centered responses. These are fleshly responses. They're not biblical responses.

They're not gospel-centered responses. Okay, so then how do we resolve conflict biblically? So how do we do this then? The passage before us.

There's conflict between Peter and Paul. What happened? Again, Peter was eating with Gentiles. Not a problem.

[16 : 58] Jews came by. Hey, I can't kind of be talking with you guys anymore. Two men fell into hypocrisy. Well, actually, one man, and then Paul says, the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy

in verse 13, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

They're professing to be one with the Gentiles in Christ, and yet acting in ways that destroyed that unity. This is vitally important in this passage. It's not about hanging out with Gentiles.

That's not what this is about. It's about the Gospel. Because in the Gospel, you have unity and reconciliation. In the Gospel, you have, an Israeli can be with a Lebanese.

An Israeli can be with a Palestinian. In the Gospel, you can have that. You can have that reconciliation because we've been reconciled with God. We can have reconciliation with each other. And if that is breaking down, Paul got upset about that.

So based upon what Paul does here, verse 14, and into verse 16, when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, if you being a Jew live like the Gentiles, not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? [18:19] What does he do here? What's Paul's approach on how to handle conflict? Here's three points for you that we can learn from. How do we resolve conflict biblically?

Paul helps us. First, approach the person directly with whom you're having the conflict instead of gossiping. Or turning away and running.

Approach the person directly. He didn't go talk to this person. Did you see what Peter did? He didn't go and do this. He didn't run. He dealt with it. Second point.

It wasn't about self-defense. It's not about his self-interest, but a defense of the Gospel. It's about the Gospel. It's about the relationship that we have in the Gospel.

That's more important to me than me being right. And you're wrong. That's what it should be about.

[19:24] It's not about who's right or wrong. It's not about what you did this and I did that. It's not what it's about. It should be about the Gospel. And it should be not about what I want, my self-interest. Because that's where selfishness comes in, right?

That's where pride comes in, right? That's where I need to have things done my way, right? That's not what it was about with Paul. See, that's why I said it's not about just hanging out with Gentiles in this passage.

It's about the Gospel. It's about the relationship that we have in the Gospel, through the Gospel, because of the Gospel. So we approach the person directly and we do it with grace and with compassion, thinking about the relationship, thinking about that person.

I want to love that person. It's not about me being right. approach the person directly. It's not about self-defense or self-interest.

It's about the Gospel. The relationship that we have in the Gospel. Third, present the issue plainly and graciously and invite a response.

[20:33] Instead of just hammering the person with how you see things. So for those of you who would draw, you have to deal with the issue. And for those of you who attack, you have to deal with the issue yet with grace, not just how you see things.

And you present the issue, you present the situation that's taking place plainly and graciously and you have a response. Let's talk about this, discuss this. And Paul was dealing with, and he doesn't go into telling us all that took place within that conversation with Peter.

He doesn't go into all the details, but we can assume and we can know for sure that they discussed the very situation about the Gospel. They did that. You know, the great part about these three points, this is exactly how God responded to us in the Gospel.

This is how God responded to us. This is how God showed His love for us in the Gospel.

How so? Let me show you. God did not attack us in His wrath, nor did He remove His presence by withdrawing from us, did He.

[21:59] Now think about it. If there's anyone who should do this toward us, it's God. If there's anyone who should attack you, it's God. If there's anyone who should withdraw from you, it's God.

Why? Because we're rebellious sinners. He could just say, you know what, I'm done. That's it, you're gone. But I was, no. Or He might say, I'm done.

I'm walking away. You're on your own. If there's anyone who could do this and be justified in doing this, it would be God. But He didn't do that.

What did He do? He sacrificially moved toward us in the person of Jesus. Who confronted sin, invited relationship, and provided reconciliation with Himself through Jesus Christ.

He did this. He approached us. It wasn't about Him. He sent Jesus to live and die and was resurrected. And He calls for a response.

[23:13] He moved toward us full of grace and truth. A couple passages for you. Do I have it here? Oh, I have it on the next screen. I'll look them up then I'll put them on the screen for you. John 1.17 For the law was given through Moses.

Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. Truth is Jesus and grace is Jesus. And then Romans 5.8 God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, what happened?

Christ died for us. Right? God sacrificially moved toward us. This is the amazing part.

I said this to this guy in Jerome. I said, what religion do you know by which you have God who becomes human? Who becomes human?

Lives like us and takes upon Himself the punishment for sinners and then He's resurrected.

[24:27] What religion proclaims that? He didn't answer. He didn't know. There was none. He didn't know how to say. He didn't know what to say. There is no other religion that's done that.

God is far off where you've got to do something to appease Him. For this God, He, the one and only God, He became like His creation. He stepped into time and became like us and lived and had relationships.

And He was perfect. And then the punishment that should come upon us, it was brought upon Him for all those that turn away from sin and put their trust in Him. And He showed that He conquered it by resurrecting from the dead.

What a God is like that! That is the Gospel. That's what God responded to us. Here's the passages for you. John 1.17, Romans 5.8.

He moved toward us. He approached us. Not about Him. Philippians 2. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

[25:37] Even what? Death on a cross. Humility. Live, died, rose. He dealt with our sin. And He calls for a response.

Are you here today? You're not a Christian. God is willing to forgive you. He's willing to give you forgiveness of all your sins because of the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

You deserve His just wrath. But He's calling you to turn from your sin and put your trust in Jesus. I mean, don't you want that? Don't you want grace? Don't you want forgiveness? He's calling you. Come. Come to Jesus and be saved. Repent. Right now. Just say, I repent and put my trust in Jesus. You can do that now. This is the gospel.

And so that means our motivation then in resolving conflict should be love. Our confidence rests in Jesus as we trust Him. And the way we resolve conflict is through grace and truth.

[26:47] There's love and we deal with it. Look, we just have to repent of our sinful patterns of attacking. Our sinful patterns of withdrawing.

Those are sinful patterns. We have to repent and trust and begin to ask the Spirit of God to do a change in us, transform us from being an attacker or withdrawer and responding and dealing with conflict in a gospel-centered way.

And the great part, the great part is that the gospel empowers us to move into conflict by faith. With a humble, confident, God-glorifying intentionality.

That's how God wants us to respond. It's by the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled in the gospel to respond to each other in a gospel-centered way in the midst of conflicts.

Friends, this is vital to the growth of this church as members. That's how we're going to deal with this. Trust me.

[27:53] We're going to offend each other. I'm going to offend you. You're going to offend me. You're going to offend each other. That's just what happens. We'll either deal with it in a gospel-centered way or in a sinful, losing way.

It's just a part of life. How we deal with relationships. How we deal with this conflict. So, if you got a bulletin this morning, on the back of the bulletin, there's actually some lines there to take notes, but then there's also a chart there.

Travis, is there an extra bulletin back there? Are there extra? Okay, they're all out. Okay. Okay. If you need one, let me know and I can make a copy.

What's that? Somebody needs one. Travis has got his hand. I see that hand raised. I see another verse of Just As I Am. What's that? No. I don't see any hands.

I put that chart in your notes on purpose and if you need a copy, let me know if you're on your way out. Just say, hey, can I have a copy of that? And Ellen can make a few extra copies of that. We'll

have that for you.

[29:11] This is straight out the gospel center life. This is straight from there. And notice the different categories. Your heart, the source, commitment, direction, feeling, goal, the result.

Here's practical things for you. How do you deal with this conflict? What are the patterns, sinful patterns that you see in your life and here's a chart to help you to bring to resolution these conflicts in your life in a gospel centered way.

Notice, heart. What's my tendency right now? Self-righteousness? Insecurity? Defensive?

I want to blame others? Or is it repentant, forgiving attitude? See how it follows the cross there. The source. What's driving this?

What am I concerned with? Am I concerned about losing face? Am I concerned about being wrong? Or am I trusting the power of the Holy Spirit working inside of me? Commitment.

[30:13] What am I seeking? Am I seeking to be right? Do I just want to be safe? Notice, the attacker's going to respond this way. The drawer is going to respond this way.

But in a gospel centered way, are you truly seeking to resolve the problem? The direction. Am I just arguing and do I want to subdue?

Denying or appeasing? Or am I talking honestly and respectfully, sharing my thoughts and feelings, conveying things in grace, respect and love? Feeling.

Is it a feeling that life is safe? Life is less painful as a withdrawer. Or are you admitting that life has its challenges in God's plan? Goal.

What cost must I spend to resolve this? Is it about my self-protection? That there's just peace? Or is it about God's will?

[31:21] God's glory? And notice it says, they're good. They're good and my good. Our good. God's glory and our good.

That should be the goal. And notice the result as well. If we respond as an attacker, you're just going to have hurt and divisiveness. As a withdrawer, you're just going to have bitterness.

You're just going to want separation. If we deal with the way God dealt with us, if we work hard to resolve conflict in a gospel-centered way, what's it going to bring? It's going to bring healing.

It's going to bring reconciliation. There's grace. It's so good. We bring it back together. We resolve the conflict and there's love and compassion. Ah, it feels good. Praise God for that.

But it's hard work. It's not easy. It's easier to just go, I can't get back, I can't get back, I can't get back, I can't get back, right? That's easier. It's easier to just go, I'm going to my bedroom now.

[32:27] That's easier. It's hard work because our tendency is to be focused on ourselves. But by God's enablement in the gospel, through His spirits, we can be a people who deal with conflict the way God wants us to deal with conflict in a gospel-centered way.

What a great time, passage, message to focus us on the gospel.

Because we're going to take the Lord's Supper. I want to give some instructions before we do this. I'm going to have a few moments of silence and let you think and ponder.

before we take the Lord's Supper this morning. Maybe you don't come from Cottonwood Bible Church and I'm a member here. But if you come from a church of like faith and practice, you've responded to Jesus Christ, maybe you've trusted in Christ, you don't come from a church but you've responded to Jesus Christ and you've been baptized by immersion, we invite you to partake of the Lord's Supper with us.

If you're not a Christian, it's not for you. Please don't take the Lord's Supper, it's not for you. It's to be demonstrated to you though.

[33:53] And, we're talking about conflict. If you had a conflict with another person and you've not gone through the part of being able to resolve that conflict and you haven't resolved it, then first, let the Lord's Supper be a demonstration to you.

Don't partake of the Lord's Supper. Let it be a demonstration to you of the Gospel. The bread is His body, the juice is His blood shed for you and then you will take that Gospel truth and go to that person and do what you can to try to resolve that conflict with them as far as it depends upon you, live in peace with all men.

So you try to resolve that and then come next time to partake of the Lord's Supper. Because God wants us to deal with the reconciliation here with us, with each other because we have reconciliation with Him.

If we say we have this but we ain't doing this, that's a problem. So deal with this way and then come and praise God He's dealt with it this way. Does that make sense?

So take a few moments and ponder and think about what we've seen from Galatians 2 about resolving conflict and then we'll have our time of giving. We'll sing one song and then we'll continue in that portion where we prepare our hearts to partake of the Lord's Supper together.

[35 : 15] Okay? Let's think. Let's think.