

1. Introduction ...

Well here we are at the start of our *Resolving Everyday Conflict* series. Why bother with such a series? The greetings in the NT letters written to churches like ours repeat two words: “*Grace and peace*”. Now some scholars will suggest that was the normal greeting in letters of the time, and Paul, Peter and John are just using it like “*To whom it may concern*” or “*Dear Sir or Madam*” of today. But ***these words were inspired the Holy Spirit down the centuries to speak to ours today.*** This is not merely a letter writing formula, but a formula God inspired in these letters to speak to us today!!! “*Grace and peace*” in ...

1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2, Phil 1:2, Col 1:2, 1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:2, 1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 3, 1 Peter 5:14, 2 Peter 1:2, 2 John 1:3, Rev 1:4

God is interested in peace. ***He wants us*** to know peace, 16 times, in letters to churches!! Pity churches can be known for anything but peace!!! And not just churches, watch this ...

... A day in the life (clip) ...

Peace can seem so elusive at times as conflict abounds. But peace doesn't just happen, more likely conflict does!! In our workplaces, schools, churches, families – even kitchens!! It wears us down, bringing us low, damaging our relationships.

But it doesn't have to be this way!! You see peace can be MADE as we are intentional about making peace in our relationships, promoting it, enhancing it and taking responsibility for it growing between us, rather than letting it slip between our fingers. This is a series on ***peacemaking*** even more so than resolving everyday conflict. Over the next 8-9 weeks we will open up simple skills, understandings, even down to words and phrases, with their matching challenge to our hearts and internal attitudes, from the Bible, inspired and illuminated the Holy Spirit, in how the Lord Jesus would move in us to promote and experience “*grace and peace*” in our relationships.

Today, after setting out what lies behind much of our conflict we will take a brief look at this new hope of peacemaking in Ephesians 4:17-32 where Paul sets out how the grace and peace he greeted them with could be seen in their community. As we proceed in this series it is likely God will be touching, prodding, pushing one past area of your life and one future. In terms of the past, most of us are currently in some sort of conflicted or unreconciled relationship. It is on God's agenda!!! He is watching and focused. Is that uncomfortable for you? He is a gracious King. Listen up! And then as we look forward we are laying down a new 'cultural foundation' for our future conflicts and disagreements at home, or work, or here at CrossLife, an opportunity to develop a culture of peacemaking around you and your spheres of influence.

I know what is like when I am caught up in conflict. I get morose, defensive, distant, grumpy. Moody I think Robyn calls it. My heart is for nothing other than me and my needs, what I want, my comfort and what I think is right. Hmmmmm a recipe for disaster! But if I put in place these principles of peace-making then I tend to move from an approach to conflict that is defined by selfishness and destructiveness to God-honouring and constructive building up of others. And I am better for it: Peacemaking brings the prospect of hope for broken relationships. Let's pray.

2. The Spark: Where does conflict come from – the triggers

So let's just take a step into the abyss and consider where our conflict comes from. What sparks conflict? Perhaps we can identify three triggers, and one may surprise you.

First conflict is not outside of God's creative hand. This is not to say God creates conflict deliberately. No, his sovereignty is not a plaything for our discomfort. What I mean is conflict is an outflow of how God created us!! He created us with diversity and difference, not boring sameness and bland monotony. This leads us to natural differences

in preferences and priorities. In one sense conflict is part of God's plan for his creation! This gives us hope for dealing with conflict: more on that in later weeks!!

A second trigger of conflict is the inevitable misunderstandings that come from those differences: a different meaning of a word, phrase, or even tone can be neutral and even handed for one person, but confronting and divisive to another!! Robyn and I had a conflict like this last week as we were talking about a birthday coming up and she said, "we have to get thinking because his birthday is imminent!" My response was "no we don't it's not imminent, its two weeks away!" She didn't mean we had to move tomorrow and plan parties/presents and the like, she just meant, its coming up. But for me imminent means its upon us!! Its tomorrow!! Do something now!! (I blame my bible training in eschatology!!). And a little conflict erupted until we stopped and discussed our understanding of "imminent". We misunderstood each other, thinking were miles apart, when really we were saying the same. Misunderstanding can be a trigger for conflict.

A final trigger for conflict is our selfish attitudes that can lead to hurtful words and actions: feelings such as anger, gossip, isolation and jealousy that come out of our mouths and promote conflict. You are driving on the family holiday and the kids, feeling a little tired and hungry ask the inevitable question with all grace and interest, "Dad are we there yet?," and in my tired state of ten hours driving, I scream at them, "how many times do you have to ask!! I told you before we would be there at about 330!!" Can't you see I'm tired trying to get there as soon as we can??" No Matt, I'm not sure and six year old can tell the time or assess the differences in hours passing on a long trip!

3. The Gasoline: What fuels conflict?

These triggers aren't the conflict themselves. The issue is what we do with our differences. What is the gasoline that fuels these differences into full blown conflicts?

(a) Our cravings ...

The Bible gives us a wonderful answer, and I don't think you will be surprised by what it says, but readily identify with it. In James 4:1 we read,

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from the desires that battle within you? You want something but you don't get it”

Ain't that the truth!! Conflict arises when I want something, and, well I'm just not getting it yet!! But I want it now!! And so I respond in unhelpful, harsh ways and words that promote conflict with others. I experienced this week as I was preparing this message. I wanted to finish writing it on Thursday so Friday, our GC Show public holiday, could be a day free of sermon preparation to spend with the family. Well, Thursday morning was quickly filled with lots of necessary but small things, so when my lunch appointment came, I hadn't added to the three pages I prepared on Tuesday. I rang Robyn and told her that I might not be home between the office and my evening meeting. After lunch I rang again to say that I wouldn't be home. She was out so I thought I would try again when I got back to the office. But when I got back necessary phone calls, emails and more conversations took over and I still didn't get to it, and so when Robyn rang to find out – the third time she tried to call, I dumped on her!! No I wouldn't be home, I haven't had time to get to it, phone calls, emails, discussions all got in the way, and now she wanted me to come home for 40 minutes before I had to go out again!! I just wanted to write something! I got quite uptight, she got uptight and tension reeked over the phone.

Why? Well in some respects it wasn't about my sermon, it was about me not getting the time and space I wanted. I felt like people and things had invaded my space I had tried to set aside for something else. And I was reacting to this inward craving that wasn't being met. It wasn't their fault, all the emails, phone calls and conversations were important!! I

was the problem, my craving for my plan ahead of everyone else wasn't met!! And ... not happy Jan!!! The ironic thing was my lunch appointment was a long one of support and space for me from some close mates, so I had had some "me time"!!

What is an out-of-control craving? It is something you want *too much* – even too much of a *good thing*. An out of control craving can be something you will do anything to get, or do anything if you are denied it. If I can't get "x", I don't care what God or anyone else thinks, I will ... Suddenly we are in the midst of a godless, sin-filled behaviour fueled by our desire: An out-of-control desire or craving which becomes more of a demand. Mum and Dad, I don't care what you think, I really need this, and I'm going to get it!!

What kind of fires do you start when the thing you want is somehow denied you?

(b) Worldly culture ...

And we don't do this in isolation. The world around us feeds this attitude of what we want we should get, when we want it!! Look at the list of throw away lines on page 3 of your booklets that easily comes out of the advertising and entertainment that surrounds us: "*You deserve it*", "*Stick up for yourself!*", "*Look out for #1*", and "*have it your way*". Entire industries can be based on this. With apologies to the women here, watch this,

... play Loreal Scarlett Johansson ad ...

Because you're worth it!! We are constantly bombarded by the message to care only about ourselves. The world tells us self-centredness is fine. It's the heart of a happy life. The Bible says differently in Philippians 2:4, "*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" Perhaps if we did more of that, there would be a less fuel for our conflicts around us!

4. The Fire: Destructive effects of conflict ...

And the impact of our conflict can be like a destructive fire. People leave their jobs,

friends, homes, leaving deep scars everywhere. Families can be destroyed as marriages fall apart, and children are estranged from their parents – we all know the stories about the feeling of dread about Christmas family gatherings!! Why? Because of family conflict! The lack of heart, or skill, to bring resolution to conflict always has worse outcomes than the hard work of reconciliation. Productivity at work can be severely limited by unresolved conflict. So too can churches. One church I know had two senior church leaders who did not speak to each other: the fact that one was an ex-missionary and one the son of an evangelist and church secretary made it even more tragic.

And then, perhaps saddest, is the impact on people's hearts and souls as the feeling of despondency, despair, anger, loneliness. They, and many other emotions, abound when my life seems to be defined by unresolved conflict. Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, addictions and yes, even suicide can have their roots in unresolved conflict. In 2009, three academics from Griffith University, Ms. Mei-Hui Wu, PhD Candidate, Professor Wendy Moyle, and Dr Ursula Kellett reviewed 22 articles on the link of family conflict and depression and their conclusions included,

- Unresolved family conflict is related to greater depressive symptoms.
- High family conflict & severity of bullying predict persistence of depressive symptoms.
- High initial levels & growth in family conflict predicted adult stressful life events, which, in turn, predicted adult depressive symptoms.
- Perceived family conflict predicts parental depression through its indirect effects on parental attachment.

Is it little wonder they found this. We all know the thoughts in our heads in the midst of unresolved conflict – you see some of them on the bottom of page 4; *“Who does my boss*

think he is, he can't treat me like that!", and, "After what he did I can never forgive him!", or, "I haven't talked to my mother in 10 years, why am I still so angry?"

5. A radically different vision of relationships (Ephesians 4:17-32)

We ignore the skills of peace-making to our own detriment. When the Lord Jesus said *"I came to give life, and give it to the full"* in John 10:10, he is saying loving and longing for him ahead of anything else is the heart of living life the best now and forever. The reality of his death and resurrection, and the forgiveness and turnaround of our sin filled lives can be seen in how we can bring reconciliation to the conflicts that bombards us. There is a better way. A vision of a peace filled life in my family, my workplaces, my church, my community, even as conflict continues. The Bible's presentation and teaching of those skills is profoundly practical. There is hope: A shockingly different vision for relationships and how we address conflict. We see two things about this in Ephesians 4:17-32.

(a) A vision that gives witness to the world ...

First, it's a vision that is remarkably different to the world that says "You deserve it" and promotes the self-centredness that comes with that message. Verses 17-21,

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

Don't live like the world *"that is not the way of life you were taught when you heard about the Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus."*

There is a different way of life – and its summed up in the Lord Jesus who said *“I am the way, the truth and the life!!”* Loving people as he did, will mean *“all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another”* as he said in John 13:35. You say you’re a Christian? It is meaningless unless you commit to resolving regular conflict His way.

(b) A vision that is driven by God ...

The Bible is clear: the Lord Jesus desire and plan is those who follow him live in unity, loving each other sacrificially and loving those outside the church that way too!! But how? This is the second point. Listen to verses 25-31,

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

This passage has a list of practices and behaviours that display life in the Lord Jesus: *put off falsehood, speak truthfully to your neighbour, do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, steal no longer but work, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* These are all great practical ways to resolve conflict, and perhaps even prevent it from getting worse!! All we have to do is get out and do it!!

No. God's way is not just "pull yourself together and just try harder". The power doesn't come from knowing the commands – it comes from somewhere else. As verse 32 says,

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Forgive *as God forgave you*. The key to extending love, mercy and forgiveness to others is to understand the love, mercy and forgiveness God extends to us. That's the engine room of resolving conflict. That's where it starts, and stays, where true deep resolution comes from. Even with your greatest enemy. For that's what we were to the Lord. Romans 5:8, *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, (or his enemies) Christ died for us."* The gospel is a message of hope, joy, and of reconciliation.

(c) Conflict as an opportunity

This radically different vision for relationships calls us to reframe our understanding of conflict: Too see it as an opportunity. Even say as a good thing. Conflict a good thing? It's so harmful, difficult and confronting, how can it be "good"!! Because conflict provides an opportunity for look for the interests of others. A chance to honour one another above ourselves. It is an opening for me to show mercy, lay down my rights in view of the needs of others. Conflict provides the prospect to show the love of God to those around me as it's not just my love at work it's his love in me, shed abroad in my hearts to those about.

6. Conclusion ...

Now this is not theologizing and theorizing. The gospel applied is inherently practical and real when it comes to resolving everyday conflict. Let's return to our kitchen and replay the conflict we saw about the holiday, but with this new way of thinking about conflict at work – showing us the hope for life and real relationships when Jesus is followed.

... reply "a day in the life" part 2 ...