



## **Class 5. Conflict Starts in the Heart**

### **James 4:1**

- The root cause of conflict: Desires in our hearts
- When we want something and feel that we will not be satisfied unless we get it, that desire starts to control us
- If others fail to meet our desires, or get in the way of us meeting them, we sometimes fight with them
- This progression follows the same steps:

### **1) Desire**

- Conflict always begins with some kind of desire
- Some desires are inherently wrong, but many are not
- You may desire some peace and quiet when you get home, but if you have children, they may frustrate that desire and cause conflict in your life
- If someone is standing in the way of a good desire, it is appropriate to talk about it
- If you cannot make progress, it is reasonable to seek help from someone that you both can talk to
- But what happens when the other person persistently fails to satisfy your desires? You can't just break off the relationship...
- You have two choices of courses of action:
  - You can trust God and seek fulfillment in him, and continue to love the person who is blocking your way and wait for God to open a door for progress
  - OR, you can keep fighting with them to achieve your desire, dwell on your disappointment, and allow your desire and disappointment to control you

## 2) Demand

- Unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts

- *"I work hard all week! I deserve a little peace and quiet when I get home."*

- While the statements we make to ourselves and other may be valid, they simply add to the problem

- The more you want something, the more you think that you deserve it. And the more you think that you are entitled to something, the more convinced you become that you cannot be happy until you get it

- When you see something as being essential to your well-being, it moves from being a desire to a demand - THIS IS WHERE THE TROUBLE SETS IN

- Even if the initial desire was not inherently wrong, it has grown so strong that it begins to control your thoughts

- It has become an IDOL

- The concept of Idolatry is much bigger than little statues

- An Idol is anything, apart from God, that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled or secure

- An Idol is anything other that we love and pursue more than God

- **Phil 3:17-20**

- Remember that Idols can arise from good desires as well as wicked ones

- It's not what you want, it how much you want it

- How do you tell when a reasonable desire might be turning into a sinful demand?

- Ask yourself these questions:

- 1) What am I preoccupied with?
- 2) "If only \_\_\_\_\_, then I would be happy"
- 3) What do I try to avoid at all costs?

## 3) Judge

- Idolatrous demands usually lead us to judge others

- When they fail to satisfy our desires or live up to our expectations, we criticize and condemn them
- We want certain things, or certain things to go our way, and when our family or friends stand in the way of that, we blow out of proportion their problems or issues to try to force them to change
- Sinful judging often involves speculating on their motives
- The closer we are to people, the more we expect of them, and the more likely we are to judge them when they fail to meet our expectations
- Expectations are not bad
- It is good to hope for the best in others
- But, if we allow these expectations to become conditions and standards that we use to judge others, that is bad

#### 4) Punish

- Idols always demand sacrifices
- When someone fails to satisfy our demands and expectations, our Idol demands that they suffer
- Whether deliberately, or unconsciously, we find ways to hurt people who don't give in to our desires
- Either we get angry, pout, impose guilt, or even resort to physical violence or sexual abuse
- Hopefully, most of us reject overt and obviously sinful means of punishing others
- But, our Idols don't give up on their cry for a sacrifice, and we develop more subtle means of punishing them
- Withdrawal from a relationship is a common way to hurt others - withholding affection or contact, acting sad, etc.
- Sending subtle, unpleasant cues over a long period of time is an age-old method of punishment
- Even if it is couched in sarcasm, wittiness or joking, a "continual dripping" will eventually destroy the foundation

- James 4:1-3

- So, how do we get out of this cycle?

- When you find yourself in conflict, work backwards through the progression to identify the desires that are controlling your heart? How am I punishing others? How am I judging others? What am I demanding? What is the root desire of that demand?

- Describe your Idols to your spouse or an accountability partner and ask them to pray for you and lovingly approach you when there are signs that the idol is still controlling you

- Realize that your Idols will continue to change and morph into other things

- Repent!

- Psalm 51:17