**Class 1**

**Danger and Opportunity**

You may have heard before about the Japanese word for **Crisis**

They don’t really have a word for **Crisis**

What they do is combine two words together to express the same emotion

**SLIDE**

**Danger** and **Opportunity**

When you are in a time of **Crisis**, there certainly can be a lot of **Danger** involved

**AND** it’s also a time full of great **Opportunity** if you safely navigate the **Dangers**

**SLIDE**

This weekend we are going to talk about **Conflict**

How to handle **Conflict** when it comes up in our lives

I think it’s healthy for us to look at **Conflict** in the context of this Japanese word

Sure, there is often plenty of **Danger** of sinning when Conflict arises

**SLIDE**

But Conflict is also an **Opportunity** for us to **GROW!**

A chance for us to become more like our Lord Jesus

**SLIDE**

An **Opportunity** for us to become **Peacemakers**

Different people treat conflict differently

To some, conflict is a hazard that threatens to sweep them off their feet and leaves them bruised and hurting

To others, it is an obstacle that they should conquer quickly and firmly, regardless of the consequences

But some people have learned that conflict is an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honors God and offers benefits to those involved

This latter view can transform the way you respond to conflict and transform you as a person and as a follower of Jesus

**SLIDE**

There are three basic ways that people respond to conflict

These responses may be arranged on a curve that resembles a hill

 *(This chart was created by Ken Sande, the author of the book* ***Peacemaker****)*

You may have heard of the term, “Fight or Flight”

We’re talking about those, but more importantly about the third choice:

To make things right

**SLIDE**

On the left slope of the hill, we find the **Flight** responses to conflict

The **Escape** responses

We’ll call these **Peace Faking**

**SLIDE**

On the right side are the **Fight** responses

The **Attack** responses

We’ll call these **Peace Breaking**

**SLIDE**

And in the center, we find the **Peace Making** responses



Imagine that this hill is covered with ice, if you go too far to the left or the right, you

 can lose your footing and slide down the slope

Similarly, when you experience conflict, it is easy to become defensive or antagonistic

Both responses make matters worse and can lead to more extreme reactions

If you want to stay on top of this slippery slope, you need to do two things to begin

**SLIDE**

First, ask God to help you **resist your natural inclination** to **escape** or **attack** when

 faced with conflict

**SLIDE**

Second, ask Him to help you develop the **love of Jesus** in your heart by resolving the conflict

**SLIDE**

The three responses found on the left side of the slippery slope are the **escape** responses – Which we are calling **Peace Faking**

People tend to use these responses when they are more interested in avoiding a conflict than in resolving it

This is where I tend to live

This attitude is common within the Ecclesia, because many Brethren believe that all

 conflict is wrong

Thinking that it’s Christ-like for us always to agree people like me usually do one of

 three things to escape from conflict

**SLIDE**

**Denial.** One way to escape from a conflict is to pretend that it does not exist

Or, if we cannot deny that the problem exists, we simply refuse to do what should be done to resolve a conflict properly

These responses bring only temporary relief and usually make matters worse

Here’s a classic example:

**SLIDE**

Genesis 16:1-6

 1) Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female

 Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.

 2) And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from

 bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

 3) So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram’s

 wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.

 4) And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she

 had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.

 5) And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my

 servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!”

 6) But Abram said to Sarai, “**Behold, your servant is in your power; do to**

 **her as you please**.” …

I’m thinking that after that, Abraham wished he had dealt with it instead of just kicking the can further down the road

**SLIDE**

**Flight.** Another way to escape from a conflict is to run away

This may include leaving the house, ending a friendship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing Ecclesias

In most cases, running away only postpones a proper solution to a problem

Let’s continue reading in Genesis 16

**SLIDE**

Genesis 16:6-8

 6) **…Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.**

 7) The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness,

 the spring on the way to Shur.

 8) And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and

 where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.”

There may be times when it is appropriate to respectfully withdraw from a confusing or

 emotional situation temporarily to calm down, organize your thoughts, and pray

Flight may also be a legitimate response in seriously threatening circumstances, such as cases of physical or sexual abuse *(Think of the times that Saul wanted to kill David, and David simply fled.)*

**SLIDE**

**Suicide.** At the farthest extreme is when people lose all hope of resolving a conflict,

 they may seek to escape the situation (or make a desperate cry for help) by attempting to take their own lives

**SLIDE**

Suicide is never the right way to deal with conflict

**SLIDE**

The three responses found on the right side of the slippery slope are the **attack**

 responses – Which we are calling **Peace Breaking**

These responses are used by people who are more interested in winning a conflict than in preserving a relationship

This attitude is seen in people who view conflict as a chance to assert their rights, to control others, or to take advantage of their situation

**SLIDE**

**Assault.** Some people try to overcome an opponent by using various forms of force

 or intimidation, such as verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence, or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally

A good example of this is found in Acts 6:

**SLIDE**

Acts 6:8-14

 8) And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs

 among the people.

 9) Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

 10) But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

 11) Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”

 12) And they **stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and**

 **they came upon him and seized him** and brought him before the council,

 13) and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law,

 14) for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”

This is like a perfect example of doctrinal differences actually rising to the level of

 assault!

**SLIDE**

**Litigation.** Another way to force people to bend to our will is to take them to court

You’re all probably aware of 1st Corinthians 6 where Paul advises against going to court, so we’ll save time and not quote that…

**SLIDE**

**Murder.** The extreme on this side is when people may be so desperate to win a dispute that they will try to kill those who oppose them

The perfect example we gave earlier of how Stephen was treated ends with him

 being dragged out of the city and stoned to death

While most of us would not actually kill someone, we shouldn’t forget what we read in

 Matthew 5:

**SLIDE**

Matthew 5:21-22

 21) “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and

 whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’

 22) But I say to you that **everyone who is angry with his brother will be**

 **liable to judgment**; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;

 and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

**SLIDE**

In the middle of the chart are the **Peacemaking** Responses

The six responses found on the top portion of the slippery slope are what we will talk about this weekend

These responses are commanded by God and work toward solutions to conflict

Did you notice that as you slide down the slope the responses get more and more extreme?

That is how **Conflict** is!

As it continues and intensifies you tend to bring out the extremes in people

Did you also notice that the responses go from being private to being more public?

When we fail to resolve a conflict through a private response, then more people have to get involved (Think of the process suggested in Matthew 18)

Let’s begin our discussion on **Conflict Resolution** by defining what a **Conflict** is

**SLIDE**

*Conflict is a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or*

 *desires*

This is a pretty broad definition so that it can include variations in taste, such as one spouse wanting to vacation in the mountains while the other prefers the beach, as well as hostile arguments, such as fights, quarrels, lawsuits, or church divisions

There are four primary causes of conflict:

**SLIDE**

**1) Misunderstandings** resulting from poor communication

Remember in Joshua when Reuben, Gad and Manasseh built an altar on the other side of the Jordan?

They almost went to war over a misunderstanding!

**SLIDE**

**2) Differences** in values, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions can also lead to conflict

**SLIDE**

Acts 15:36-39

 36) And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the

 brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”

 37) Now **Barnabas wanted to take with them John** called Mark.

 38) But **Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn**

 **from them** in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

 39) And **there arose a sharp disagreement**, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus

**SLIDE**

**3) Competition** over limited resources, such as time or money, is a frequent source

 of disputes in families, churches, and businesses

A classic example was when Abraham and Lot had such large herds that the land couldn’t support the both of them and there was conflict between the herdsmen

**SLIDE**

**4) Sin** - Sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions

**SLIDE**

James 4:1-3

 1) What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this,

 that your **passions** are at war within you?

 2) You **desire** and do not have, so you murder. You **covet** and cannot obtain,

 so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

 3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your **passions**.

**SLIDE**

I want to be clear…

**SLIDE**

**Conflict** is not always **Sinful**

It’s just a fact of life

We are all created as unique individuals with different opinions, convictions, desires, perspectives, and priorities

That is how God created us!

Many of these differences are not inherently right or wrong; they are simply the result of God-given diversity and personal preferences

**SLIDE**

1st Corinthians 12:21-27

 21) The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the

 head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

 22) On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are

 indispensable,

 23) and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the

 greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,

 24) which our more presentable parts do not require. But **God has so**

 **composed the body**, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

 25) **that there may be no division in the body**, but that the members may

 have the same care for one another.

 26) If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

 27) Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

When handled properly, disagreements can stimulate productive dialogue, encourage creativity, promote helpful change, and generally make life more interesting

**SLIDE**

And **HERE** is one of the hardest things I’ll say all weekend:

**SLIDE**

Although we should seek **Unity** in our relationships, we should not demand

 **Uniformity**

**SLIDE**

I love the example of the building of the Temple in Jerusalem…

Have you ever noticed that Egypt (which throughout the Bible is synonymous with

 sin) built with bricks?

The sinful way of thinking is to break you down – smash you into little bits – and then pack you into a mold and form you and shape you so that you look exactly like everyone else

**SLIDE**

Why?

Because it’s **SO MUCH EASIER** to build with bricks!

Each one is exactly the same shape and size, and we can quickly and efficiently build an ugly boring wall

**SLIDE**

But God builds with stones

Round ones, square ones, big ones, small ones, flat ones, long ones, skinny ones, fat ones – **ALL DIFFERENT KINDS** of stones

Sure, it’s much harder!

Sure, it takes a lot longer!

Sure, it requires much more effort!

But look at the result!

Look at the beauty that you end up with!

God appreciates and works with the differences of each one of us in order to build His Ecclesia

He doesn’t want to smash us down and remove the core of who we are so that He

 can fit us in some mold

He chose us for who we are

He has a plan and place for each one of us in His Kingdom

Now! That doesn’t mean that he wants us exactly as we are…

There are some rough patches and a few knobs sticking out that He needs to work off so that we fit in nicely with those around us

Remember, that the stonework was done “off premises” so that the noise and the

 mess was not on the Temple Site

There are going to be some conflicts that God brings into your life to help shape you and form you into a better person

He doesn’t want all that noise and mess on the Temple Site

He wants you to resolve these things quietly and peacefully in private, and not blow it up into a big issue for the whole Ecclesia to have to deal with

But He **IS** going to bring some conflict into your life

Conflict is neither an inconvenience nor an occasion to force our will on others, but rather an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God in our lives

This is what Paul told the Corinthians when legal and dietary disputes threatened to divide their Ecclesia:

**SLIDE**

1st Corinthians 10:31-33

 31) So, **whether you eat or drink**, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of**

 **God**.

 32) Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,

 33) just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, **not seeking my own**

 **advantage, but that of many**, that they may be saved.

Look at conflict as an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and grow to be more

 like Christ

**SLIDE**

When trying to peacefully resolve a conflict in the spirit of Christ, there are four things to remember

Try to remember these four things and the process will go a lot smoother

You might find it helpful to ask yourself four questions to help you remember

**SLIDE**

**1) Glorify God**

Ask yourself: *“How can I please and honor God in this conflict?”*

**SLIDE**

**2) Get the Log out of your own Eye**

Ask yourself: *“How can I demonstrate a Christ-like spirit by taking responsibility for my*

 *contribution to this conflict?”*

**SLIDE**

**3) Gently Restore**

Ask yourself: *“How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?”*

**SLIDE**

**4) Go and Be Reconciled**

Ask yourself: *“How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable resolution to this conflict?”*

Ask yourself those four questions as you are driving to the meeting and the meeting will turn out a lot better than you expected

We need to have a goal of living at peace with each other

We talk about words like **Fellowship** and **Unity**, but I think in the back of our minds we’re really just thinking about potlucks and the Breaking of Bread

Our goal should be to live at peace

**SLIDE**

**1) God is Peace**

Peace is part of God’s Character

God is often defined by His Character

Did you ever notice that God is frequently referred to as “The God of Peace”?

**SLIDE**

1st Corinthians 13:11

 11) Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, **live in peace**; and **the God of love and peace** will be

 with you.

**SLIDE**

**2) God Blesses us with Peace**

One of the blessings that God gives to those who follow Him is Peace

Here is one of the famous blessings from God in Numbers 6

**SLIDE**

Numbers 6:24-26

 24) **The LORD bless you** and keep you;

 25) the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

 26) the LORD lift up his countenance upon you **and give you peace.**

**SLIDE**

**3) God Commands us to Pursue Peace**

God repeatedly instructs his people to seek Peace

**SLIDE**

Psalm 34:14

 14) Turn away from evil and do good; **seek peace and pursue it.**

God offers us three different levels of Peace

The tricky part is that these three levels are connected

Many people don’t really care about God or even about others, but they still want peace within themselves

As we’ll see, it’s impossible to know real peace unless you pursue peace with God first and also with the people in your life

**SLIDE**

**Peace with God** does not come automatically

All of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from God

Through the sacrifice of His son, God has made it possible for us to have peace with Him

**SLIDE**

Romans 5:1-2

 1) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, **we have peace with God**

 **through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

 2) Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which

 we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Believing in Jesus means more than being baptized, going to meeting, or trying to be a good person

Believing in Jesus involves admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God’s approval by your works

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 2:8-9

 8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own

 doing; it is the gift of God,

 9) **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.

As you believe in Jesus, accept God’s gracious gift of salvation, and draw closer to God through the study of His Word, the privilege of prayer, and the fellowship of this Ecclesia, **THEN** His peace begins to fill every part of your life

**SLIDE**

**Peace with Others**

This peace, which is often referred to as “Unity” is not simply the absence of conflict

Unity is the presence of genuine harmony, understanding and goodwill

This peace is the direct result of obeying the 2nd Commandment – *Love your neighbor as yourself*

Our study this weekend is all about Unity – It’s all about showing us how to pursue peace with others when conflict disrupts our relationships

**SLIDE**

**Peace with Yourself**

Internal peace is a sense of contentment, tranquility, order, rest and security

Internal peace alludes most people

Even if you do experience it, you probably won’t experience it all the time

The reason that this kind of peace is hard to attain is because it’s really not through our own efforts that we attain it

Peace is a gift from God

Peace is a by-product of Righteousness

**SLIDE**

Isaiah 32:17

 17) And **the effect of righteousness will be peace**, and the result of

 righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

It kind of feels like God has made it clear, but He hasn’t made it easy

Most people want peace in their lives

But the process is not that easy

It involves making Peace with God and then obeying his command to live at peace with others… **THEN** you get the peaceful life that you want

**SLIDE**

Living a peaceful life actually requires quite a bit of effort

It is **NOT** the **DEFAULT** position for human beings

By default, we are sinful beings, and therefore our lives are full of conflict

It requires some effort on our part to live righteous lives and thereby remove conflict from our lives

**SLIDE**

What is the **Enemy of Peace**?

What is it that keeps Peace from us?

Our own sinfulness is our greatest enemy against peace in our lives

Our natural inclination is to look out for ourselves, and we often hurt others in the process

If we see others people as our adversaries and focus our attacks on them, we will never really deal with the root cause of problems

We have to look in the mirror to see our adversary, not out the window!

**SLIDE**

We need to strive to live at peace with each other

Every one of the letters in the New Testament contains a call to live at peace with each other - Ephesians 4 is a great example

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 4:1-3

 1) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of

 the calling to which you have been called,

 2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in

 love,

 3) **eager to** **maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**.

**EAGER** to maintain the unity of the Spirit

Does that describe us well?

Or do we begrudgingly attempt to maintain unity in our relationships?

The next few verses after this one are some of the most beautiful verses on this topic

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 4:4-7

 4) **There is one body** and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope

 that belongs to your call—

 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

 7) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

This is a core concept that keeps coming up over and over: There is **ONE** Body

If you are getting so upset about the color of the carpeting that you are thinking about taking a stand and moving out and forming your own Ecclesia… Then you need to take a deep breath and reread this verse

One, Lord, One Faith, One Baptism – **ONE** Body!

I always found it weird that these wonderful verses are followed by some very strange verses

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 4:8-10

 8) Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,

 and he gave gifts to men.”

 9) (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also

 descended into the lower regions, the earth?

 10) He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the

 heavens, that he might fill all things.)

I can’t really explain these verses, but it makes me think that it’s saying that Christ went to any length, and wants us to go to any length, for the sake of Unity in the body

I do love the next few verses though, as they really reinforce the idea that although we are called to Unity, we are not supposed to seek Uniformity

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 4:11-13

 11) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds

 and teachers,

 12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of

 Christ,

 13) until we all attain to the **unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son

 of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

This is hard for us to do

The natural, human reaction is to expect that the other person should think like you

They are currently thinking in a different, obviously wrong way, and you want them to change

You feel that if we are going to have Unity we have to think alike

You want them to change

You want them to be just like you

*“If everyone was just like me then we would have Unity”*

You are an ear, and you want them all to be ears!

“If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?”

The lesson of the different parts of the body is that even though we are supposed to live together in Unity, there will never be Uniformity

The other parts of the body will never look like you, act like you, talk like you, or even fulfill the same roles in the body that you do

They actually **COULDN’T BE ANY DIFFERENT**

That is the lesson of Unity that is hard to swallow

**SLIDE**

You are called to be **UNITED** as **ONE** in the love of Jesus Christ with people who

 **couldn’t be any different from you**

**THAT** is why this process is so hard

Because you know how God is going act…

You know what He is going to do

In order to make you grow, He is going to bring into your life some people that He knows are going to be very hard for you accept

People who He knows are going to be very hard for you to live with

He is not going to make it easy

He wants you to grow, to change, to improve to be a better disciple

Paul closes this chapter with some very clear and simple advice on how to live peaceably with others

**SLIDE**

Ephesians 4:32

 32) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another**, as God in

 Christ forgave you

**SLIDE**