**Class 2**

**Conflict Starts in the Heart**

The idea that we are proposing is that conflicts that arise in your life are not simply

 distractions and temptations, but an opportunity for you to grow spiritually

We talked about several of the potential responses to conflict

The **Fight** or **Flight** responses – **Breaking Peace** and **Faking Peace**

What we want to talk about this weekend is **Making Peace**

The opportunities that we all have to resolve conflict, reconcile relationships, be more

 like our Lord Jesus, and please our Heavenly Father

We talked a bit about what causes conflict and some steps to do when facing it

Most importantly, we talked about pursuing **Unity** in our Ecclesia

Taking these steps can be quite challenging

The Fight or Flight response is so natural to us Humans that it is almost automatic

It takes effort to react spiritually

It takes effort to try do God’s will

**SLIDE**

The more you trust in God, the easier it is to do His will

This is especially true when you are involved in a conflict

**SLIDE**

We trust God because **God is Sovereign**

Sovereign means to be supreme, unlimited, and totally independent of any other influence

God takes a personal interest in even the smallest details of our lives

The tricky part to grasp is that God’s sovereignty is so complete that He exercises ultimate control even over painful and unjust experiences in our lives

This is hard to accept, because we tend to judge God’s actions according to our reality of right and wrong

God is above us, and we can’t judge Him based on our reality

**SLIDE**

Isaiah 29:16

 16) You turn things upside down! **Shall the potter be regarded as the clay**,

 that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me”; or the

 thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding”?

God allows suffering and permits unjust acts even though He has the power to stop them

That is really hard for us humans to swallow

We want God to fit our perception of what is Good

We want God to be good to us all the time

God deals with a much bigger picture

God has a lot more to deal with than we see or understand

Consider what Peter said about Jesus in Acts 2:23

**SLIDE**

Acts 2:23

 23) this Jesus, **delivered up according to the definite plan and**

 **foreknowledge of God**…

God’s plan involved the crucifixion and death of His own son

I don’t think that my mind could even begin to understand that concept

**SLIDE**

God allows suffering

God is not like us

We don’t think like Him

But just because we often may not understand what He is doing

We have to keep one important point in mind

**SLIDE**

**God is Good!**

Not only is God in control, but God is also Good

**SLIDE**

Psalm 62:11-12

 11) Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that **power belongs to**

 **God**,

 12) and that to you, O Lord, **belongs steadfast love**. For you will render to a

 man according to his work.

The foundation for our trust in God is constructed of both power and love - He is not only in control over us, but he also loves us!

The fact that God is good does not mean that he will insulate us from suffering

Rather it means that he will be with us in our suffering

**SLIDE**

Isaiah 43:1-2

 1) But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who

 formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

 2) **When you pass through the waters, I will be with you**; and through the

 rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

By allowing suffering in our lives, God teaches us to rely more on Him

Trust that God won’t give you more than you can handle

Although you can be sure that God is always working for good in your life and the lives

 of those around you, you will not always know exactly what that good is

In many cases His purpose will not be evident for a long time, and in some cases they are simply too profound for us to ever comprehend

This is the key to dealing faithfully with painful situations and situations that seem unjust

**SLIDE**

God may not tell us everything that we **WANT** to know, but He has already told us

 everything that we **NEED** to know

Instead of wasting time trying to figure things out that are beyond our comprehension, turn your attention to the promises and instructions that God has revealed to you

God is both sovereign and good so we can trust Him

We have to learn to trust in Him

Trusting God does not mean that we will never have questions, doubts or fears

**SLIDE**

Trusting God means that **IN SPITE OF** our questions, doubts and fears we continue to believe that He is loving, that He is in control, and that He is working for our good

The Bible is full of people who experienced all kinds of doubt, and yet continued to trust in God

Job immediately comes to mind

Joseph is a great story of trusting in God

David couldn’t understand why God would allow evil men to flourish, and wrote about this often

Peter and Paul were able to sing praises to God even after they had been poorly treated by the authorities

What is it that allows a person who experiences extremely difficult problems, and wrestles with doubt, to keep going in spite of these challenges?

**SLIDE**

Among other things, it is the **humility** to recognize the limits of our own understanding and wisdom to bow before God’s eternal purpose

**SLIDE**

Through **prayer**, **study** and **experience** you learn to trust in the sovereignty of God

This trust releases you from burden of unanswered questions and helps you overcome the fears and doubts that challenge us

**SLIDE**

Trust is a **decision**

Your view of God will have a profound effect on how much you trust him

If you don’t really believe that he is both sovereign and good, then trusting in him will be hard

A god who is loving but not in control is simply a “Heavenly Santa Claus” who means well but can’t insulate you from trouble and grief - Such a god fails to inspire trust

On the other hand, if you believe that God is sovereign and good you will be able to trust and obey Him in the midst of the most difficult circumstances

If you are embroiled in a conflict, this is the time to trust God

I believe that you are not there because of bad luck or even the bad temper of the person with whom you are in conflict

You are there because God wants you to grow

God wants you to learn something

Go into the conflict with that as your base, and you will come out of it much better

Even if you were unable to successfully resolve the conflict, you can still learn a lot and grow to be more like Jesus and our Father

One of Christ’s most famous commandments about **Conflict Resolution** is in Matthew 7:3-5

**SLIDE**

Matthew 7:3-5

 3) Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice

 the log that is in your own eye?

 4) Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your

 eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?

 5) You **hypocrite**, first **take the log out of your own eye**, and then you will

 see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

If you read it carefully, though, it doesn’t forbid loving correction, it forbids **premature** and **improper** correction

Before you talk to others about their faults, Jesus wants you to face up to your own

Once you have dealt with your contribution to a conflict, then you may approach others about theirs

**SLIDE**

As you examine your role in the conflict, it helpful to look for **two things**:

 1) Do you have an **overly sensitive attitude** which causes you to be offended

 too easily by other’s behavior?

**SLIDE**

 2) Have you contributed to the conflict through your own **sinful behavior**?

First, we’ll talk about **attitude** issues, and then we can talk about **behavior** issues

As you evaluate your role in a conflict, it is helpful to clearly define the issues that separate you from the other people

**SLIDE**

Conflicts generally involve two kinds of issues: **Material** and **Personal**

**SLIDE**

**Material Issues** involve substantive matters like money, property, rights & responsibilities - These types of issues are best resolved through **Negotiation**, which we will discuss in Class 5

**SLIDE**

**Personal Issues** related to what happens between people

These issues involve our attitudes and feelings towards others that result from how we have treated one another

Personal Issues are often expressed in thoughts of upset, or feelings of frustration or anger

These types of issues are best resolved through Overlooking, Confession, or

 **Forgiveness** which we will also discuss in our last class together

**SLIDE**

Some conflicts involve **ONLY** Material Issues and other **ONLY** Personal Issues, but **MOST** disputes involve **BOTH** kinds of issues getting tangled up together

A good example is Luke 12:13-15

**SLIDE**

Luke 12:13-15

 13) Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the

 **inheritance** with me.”

 14) But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”

 15) And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all

 **covetousness**, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

The **Material** Issue was the dividing of the Inheritance, and the **Personal** Issue was the brother’s greed which kept them from resolving the conflict in a cooperative way

In order to properly resolve your conflicts, you have to define the issues

First try to agree on the primary **Material** Issues or Issues

Then identify the primary **Personal** Issues

Only after you successfully sort out the issues can you begin to take steps to resolve the problem

In many cases, if you look at a particular issue from a Bible perspective, you will realize that it simply not worth fighting over

In many cases, the best way to resolve a conflict is to simply overlook the personal offenses of others

I know that this may be the hardest piece of advice you’ll hear today

We don’t want to have to do this

But it’s a clear biblical principle

**SLIDE**

Proverbs 19:11

 11) Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to **overlook an offense**.

This really is the simple truth

Just grow up

Don’t act like a little kid

The Ecclesia with the most adults wins!

**SLIDE**

Be the kind of person that God wants you to be and just overlook the offense

**SLIDE**

One of the reasons we sometimes find it difficult to overlook offenses is that we have an overly sensitive attitude or a tendency to dwell on what others have done

In **Philippians 4** Paul gives instructions on how to examine your attitude in **five easy steps**

Let’s break these six verses down and look at them

**SLIDE**

Philippians 4:4-9

 4) **Rejoice in the Lord always**; again I will say, rejoice.

 5) **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone**. The Lord is at hand;

 6) **do not be anxious** about anything, but in **everything by prayer** and

 supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**SLIDE**

Philippians 4:4-9

 7) And the peace of God, **which surpasses all understanding**, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

 8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just,

 whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.**

 9) What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—**practice these things**, and the God of peace will be with you.

**SLIDE**

 1) **Rejoice in the Lord always** – It’s so important that he even repeats it,

 **“*Again I say Rejoice!”*** – What on Earth is so important that you have to fight about it? Open your eyes and think about how joyful you should be because of what God has given you

**SLIDE**

 2) **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone** - Being reasonable in the

 midst of a conflict is a good way give grace to others, and guards you from speaking or acting harshly – Most people are known for being **unreasonable** in a conflict, why not be the one who is know as being reasonable?

**SLIDE**

 3) **Replace anxiety with prayer** - Stress builds when we are experiencing

 conflict. Paul knew that you can’t just stop being anxious, so he instructs us

 to replace worrying with ***“prayer and supplication with thanksgiving”***

You’ll notice in Verse 7 that this isn’t something that comes natural to us

The peace of God surpasses all human understanding

Your sinful nature is **NOT** going to want to do this, but allow the peace of God to come

 into your heart

**SLIDE**

 4) **Look for the Good** - A negative perspective dwells on the hurt and

 how little you deserve it - You overcome this by thinking about the

 qualities of others that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and

 commendable – Think about the excellent – Not the trivial

**SLIDE**

 5) **Practice what you’ve learned** - All of the Bible Classes, Sunday

 Schools, Exhortations and Lectures you have attended are in **VAIN**

 unless you put it into practice - Then ***“the God of Peace will be with you”***

So spend some time examining yourself before you go charging into the conflict

You can’t always know the personal issues that the person you are involved with is

 carrying

Be generous

Assume the best of them

Concentrate on your own personal issues

Why is it that **YOU** are so connected to this conflict?

What baggage are you carrying?

My grandfather always said, “It takes two to tango”

I’m always on the lookout for what I’m contributing to the problem

**SLIDE**

Another way to avoid conflict is to consider the cost of unresolved conflict

As long as a disagreement is unresolved, there is potential for further damage to the relationship

Nothing resolves it faster than counting the costs of a conflict at the outset of a dispute and compare them to the benefits of quickly settling the matter

**SLIDE**

Matthew 5:25-26

 25) **Come to terms quickly with your accuser** while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

 26) Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Some people resist overlooking offenses and settling disputes quickly because they think that they “rights” and it would be “fair” to just let the other person off

Where would we be if God thought that same way

God is compassionate and merciful and expects us to treat each other the same way

**SLIDE**

Luke 6:36

 36) **Be merciful**, even as your Father is merciful.

**SLIDE**

Let’s talk about where most conflicts come from

**SLIDE**

James 4:1

 1) What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your **passions** are at war within you?

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 **FOUR** steps:

**SLIDE**

**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

**SLIDE**

**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

**SLIDE**

When you see something as being **essential to your well-being**, it moves from being a **desire** to a **demand**

**SLIDE**

**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

**SLIDE**

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 that we love and pursue more than God

**SLIDE**

Philippians 3:17-20

 17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

 18) For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

 19) Their end is destruction, **their god is their belly**, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

 20) But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

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?

**SLIDE**

Ask yourself these questions:

1) What am I **preoccupied** with?

**SLIDE**

2) “If only BLANK, **then** I would be happy”

**SLIDE**

3) What do I try to **avoid** at all costs?

Based on your answers to these questions, you’ll quickly learn if your Desires have

turned into Demands and those Demands have become Idols

**SLIDE**

**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

**SLIDE**

**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

**SLIDE**

James 4:2-3

 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.

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

**SLIDE**

Repent!

**SLIDE**

Psalm 51:17

 17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a **broken and contrite heart**, O

 God, you will not despise.

**SLIDE**