

## **Ephesians 4:25-32 — Christians and Conflict**

**April 6, 2014**

Good morning CrossWinds. Is there anybody here that has somebody in life they find annoying? Do you have somebody that is irritating and gets under your skin? Do you have a specific name that comes to mind? Hopefully you are not married to that person.

Every one of us has people that annoy us. It can be as simple as a personality conflict or they can be bent on evil against us.

As a Christian, how we handle our disagreements with the people that annoy us is one of the most important ways we live the Christian life. Today, we will learn how Christians handle conflict in a way that is different from the rest of the world. This is a message most of us will need to go back to on a weekly basis, some of us on a daily basis.

We are in a series called, “Who Am I?” It is a study of the book of Ephesians. The first half of the book talks about what God has done for us through Jesus and our new identity. We are the most blessed beings in the universe all as a gift to us from God the Father through his son Jesus. The second half of the book talks about how Christians live in a way that is different than the rest of the world. We don’t live a Christian life so God will save us. We live a different life out of gratitude to God because he has saved us.

Before we put our fingers in the text, let’s talk about conflict in general.

## Conflict Basics

### Where do conflicts come from?

1. **Wrongs done to me.** The most obvious place conflicts come from are when people do us wrong. They cut us off in traffic so we give them the immediate justice of our horn and the stare of death. We receive an email from a country in Africa asking for our social security number because it claims a long-lost relative died and left us \$100,000. We know it is not true. Some scam artist in an Internet cafe in the desert is trying to steal our money. We get angry about this, and we should. This is not the only place our conflicts come from.
2. **Perceived wrongs done to me.** A surprising amount of the time, the wrongs we think people do to us are not really there, or if they are there, they were not intentional. We assume people are against us. For example, I send a text message that shares my heart and the person I sent it to never bothers to respond. I start to get angry. I assume they are thinking the worst about me. In reality they may be busy or have a crisis of their own. I see this all the time in counseling where people assume their spouse did something to hurt them when it was never intentional. For example, you come home and your spouse is quiet and irritable. You don't say anything to them but just go with the flow. What do you start thinking? "What did I do wrong? Why are they treating me this way?" In reality it may have nothing to do with you. They simply had a bad day at work and are having a hard time talking about it. We assume they are angry with us and we have no idea why.

3. **My jealousy.** James says one of the reasons we fight is because we are jealous of other people's stuff.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 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. James 4:1–2 (ESV)

We are jealous of other people. We are jealous of their cars because ours is a beater, their houses because it is bigger than ours, their wives because they are prettier than ours, their looks because we don't have them, their bodies because they have smaller ones than we do, their intellect because they are smarter than we are, their athletic skills because we were born with two left feet, their families because they have great ones and their families because they are happier than ours. A lot of conflict is based on a lack of contentment. When we have a conflict, before we point the finger at other people, we need to look at ourselves. Is our conflict because we assume people are against us? Is our conflict because we are jealous of gifts and skills God has given others that he hasn't given us?

#### **With whom will I have my worst conflicts?**

I told you this before and it worth repeating. The person you marry is the most likely person on the planet to murder you. Why is this true? *The severity of a conflict is not related to the magnitude of the offense as much as it is related to the proximity of the offender.* A thief who breaks into your house is not capable of causing you the deepest amount of pain. It is the people closest to you that can wound you the deepest. Strangers don't let you down, friends do. Random people can say nasty things about you on Facebook and we can blow it off.

When it is your girlfriend writing nasty posts, that hurts. Expect your worst conflicts with those you love.

### What do my conflicts reveal?

Most of us think that conflict shows us how messed up everybody in the world is. If everyone was like us, all the problems in the world would go away. That is not what the Bible teaches. Our conflicts don't just reveal what is wrong with other people, they reveal what is wrong with us. The Bible says conflict reveals the truth about *our hearts*.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 (ESV)

When others hurt us, it is like a pin-prick to our hearts. What leaks out under the pressure of anger is what is truly inside. Usually we have a filter between our heads and our lips. Under pressure, the filter slips. We say what we are actually thinking.

Amy Carmichael used this illustration. Take two glasses. Fill one with clear water and the other with muddy water. Bump both of them. What comes out is only what is inside. How we handle our differences doesn't reveal what is wrong with everybody else, it reveals what is wrong with us.



Knowing that, let's look at what Ephesians says about conflict.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own

hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:25–32 (ESV)

### **How am I to be different in conflict?**

#### **Speak the truth. Don't lie.**

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Ephesians 4:25 (ESV)

As Christians, one way we honor Christ in our conflicts is we speak the truth. Most of the time truth-telling isn't hard until there is tension between people. When we are angry and someone asks us if we are angry, what do we do? In the name of Christian maturity, we lie through our teeth. "I am fine. "That didn't hurt me." "I didn't even notice it." Stop lying! "Yes, it did matter. I am really upset." Christians aren't to be liars. We are to be honest. In the name of Christian maturity we are lying through our teeth. That isn't the way Christians handle conflict. If you are angry or hurt, tell the truth. Just be honest.

When we tell the truth we can do it in a way that is hurtful or helpful. Most of us are only familiar with hurtful ways of telling the truth, of yelling and screaming. The Bible tells us to be helpful and gentle when we speak and try to restore broken relationships.

Not only do we lie, but because we are hurt and we haven't been honest about it with the person who hurt us, we start to avoid that person because every time we see them we keep thinking about the tension between us. We go to a different worship service than they do. We look at the floor or check email on our

cell phone when they walk by. If they talk to us, we give them the shortest answer possible.

This is the reason caller ID was invented. With caller ID we can ignore people and let it go to voicemail. Why do we do this? Many times it is because we are liars. We don't want to heal a broken relationship by being honest about things so we just keep avoiding people. That is not the way Christians handle our conflicts to honor Christ. We are to be different. We are straightforward and honest. We are not like an onion that has dozens of layers to go through before we get to the real issue.

One of the things that kills me is what I call "Midwestern nice." That means that when people have a problem with you, they tell everybody else about the problem but you. That is not Midwestern nice. It is evil. It is lying, because when the person you have a problem comes by, Midwesterners deny there is a problem. That is not the way we honor Christ in the church, especially at CrossWinds. Our second core value at CrossWinds is:

**COMMUNITY — We believe authentic relationships that serve one another honor Christ in the life of the church.**

We believe in telling the truth.

**Exaggeration is a form of lying.** We do this all the time. "Honey, the dress was on sale. It was only \$20." It was really \$29.99 but we stretched the truth. That is a form of lying. It is not the way Christians live. We are different.

**Flattery is a form of lying.** When we tell people they are so good at what they do when they are average, that is lying. When your wife asks if you like her

new short boy hairstyle, men, don't try flattery. In love tell her the truth and face the consequences. Just tell the truth in love.

Why is it so important to be truthful in our speech? Speaking about the devil, the Bible says:

...truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (ESV)

Lying, half-truths, and exaggerations are all the native tongue of the devil. Truth-telling is the native tongue of God. When we tell half-truths, we are acting more like the devil than Jesus.

**Does telling the truth mean I tell everyone everything I know?** No.

While giving misleading information is a form of lying, sometimes sharing all the details of a situation is also sin, or at the very least, a lack of wisdom. Many times all the details are not helpful. Imagine if we had an issue of church discipline where the elders followed Matthew 18 and they were forced to come to the last step of the discipline process where they share it with the church. If we ever reached that stage, you know I will be truthful about details but I won't share all the details because that would be unhelpful.

**What happens to a church when people are untruthful with one another?** We are members of one another. The church is a body. We are connected. The only way for the body to operate is if all parts of the body tell one another the truth. If the hand put itself on a hot stove but the nerves chose to tell only part of the truth to the brain and present the stove as warm, not burning, what would happen? If the eyes didn't tell the truth to the brain when we were driving a car, imagine the horrific car accidents that would happen every day.

In the same way, dishonesty and lying in the body of Christ causes the entire church body to suffer. Untruthfulness doesn't just hurt you, it hurts everyone in the church. The church is to be a place that is different from the world. The world is filled with lies; the church is filled with truth. That is how we handle our conflicts differently.

**When I get angry, avoid sin.**

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:26–27 (ESV)

**Is it a sin to get angry?** No! Did Jesus get angry? Yes! There is justifiable anger. When people were getting ripped off by the money changers at the temple and the court of the Gentiles was not being used as a place of prayer but was turned into a mini-mall, Jesus was angry. Jesus was angry when people were taken advantage of by the system. Sometimes anger is a great motivator toward good. After the Sandy Hook school shootings, mothers got together and formed an organization called, "Mother's Against Gun Violence." Their concern is that it is easier to get an assault weapon on Facebook, without a background check, than it is to get a driver's license. They are channeling their anger over having their children shot toward something good, which is stopping children from buying assault weapons. Not all anger is unjustified or wrong. Anger can be a great motivator.

**Does a sin done to me justify a sin done by me?** Many people think that if their anger is justifiable, a sinful response is justifiable. A wife comes home to find her husband in bed with another woman. She grabs the meat cleaver from the kitchen because she was sinned against. She is thinking of justifiable



homicide against her husband at best, dismemberment at worst. That is wrong. Sin done to you does not justify sin done by you. If someone gossips about you, that doesn't justify you gossiping about them. If somebody hits you, that doesn't justify popping them in the nose. Jesus told us if somebody strikes you on one side of the face, turn the other cheek. Don't strike them back. When you think somebody is jerk, that doesn't give you the right to be a jerk back to them or yell at them.

**Should I hold my anger in or let my anger out?** This is a trick question. In one sense, it is good to hold your anger. Sometimes it is good to take a walk and pray so you can think before you speak. In a conflict, you often don't want to say the first thing that comes to mind. It is rash and sinful. On the other hand, it is even more sinful to stuff our anger and keep holding it. Many Christians are anger stuffers. They are conflict stuffers. The longer we stuff our anger, the longer it festers and grows. Like battery acid in our hearts, it will slowly pit our spirit. When we sit on anger, it doesn't take long before it turns into bitterness. In a moment we will see where bitterness leads. Unless we deal with our anger, it will always be the defining piece between us and the person we are angry with. Twenty years later we will pick up the same conflict if it isn't resolved. When we hold anger, it will kill us from the inside out. Holding anger will turn us into bitter person where our friends will prefer being locked in an outhouse in July to being around us.

**When do you know your anger is turning into bitterness?** You know your anger is turning into bitterness when you start replaying the mental tapes of

the wrongs done to you over and over again in your mind. When you are constantly reliving how you were hurt, you are becoming a bitter person. When you know all the exact details of the wrong done to you, the way the person sat, the way they cocked their head, the exact words they spoke, the clothes they wore, the weather that day; the reason you know all the details is because you keep playing the tape over and over. You have become a bitter person.

That is not the way Christians handle anger. Paul said we shouldn't let the sun go down on our anger. That means we don't sit on anger. Christians handle conflict differently. We talk it out and work it out, not months later but as soon as possible. Later this morning, we will see why holding anger is so dangerous, because it starts us on a cycle of bitterness that will destroy us.

Another reason we don't hold our anger is because it gives the devil a foothold in our lives. When we sit on anger, we start to view ourselves as victims. When tempted to sin, we start to legitimize our sin. In Ephesians 6, we will learn that we are involved in a supernatural battle and one of Satan's most effective tools against us is using conflict to turn our anger into bitterness. Our anger can offer a chance of satanic attack that flies completely under most of our radars because we don't think it is wrong to sit on anger. We don't think it is wrong to keep replaying the tape. This is a big deal. The rest of the people in the world sit on their anger, they don't solve their anger. The rest of the world becomes bitter; that is not the way we honor Christ in our conflicts. Christians, deal with it and move on as soon as possible.

**What if it is in my nature to get angry?** You find people blaming their anger on things they have no control over. “Of course I am a passionate person, I am Italian.” “I am Greek.” “I am Irish.” “Just be thankful I haven’t killed anyone. My great grandfather was in the mob. You can’t blame me for being angry. It is my ethnic background.” “It is just the way my family does things. My father threw plates. My mother threw lamps. Grandfather kicked in wall. Just be thankful I am not worse.”

That is crazy. As soon as you set yourself up as a victim of your background you are saying things are out of control and you can never change. The Bible says our anger problems are because of our family background. It is because we are part of Adam’s family tree. As Christians, we are taken out of Adam’s family tree and grafted into Christ’s family tree. We can now start acting like our new family line. Through the Holy Spirit we can now act like Jesus. Don’t claim to love Jesus, act like Satan and blame it on somebody else.

**Don’t steal from others but try to give to those in need.**

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.  
Ephesians 4:28 (ESV)

Sometimes you have people that are outright thieves. Approximately \$1 billion is stolen a year on the Internet and two million people a year have their identities compromised online. Christians are not to be crooks. I am not worried that we have a bunch of outright bank robbers this morning.

In a conflict, however, we often try to steal from others. One of the ways Christians steal is by not doing our best. When we don’t like our bosses’ policies,

we take extra coffee breaks. We give a half-hearted effort in our work because we don't think our bosses deserve our best. They aren't paying us enough.

Paul said that isn't the way Christians live. We always do our best. Our goal is to work hard in whatever we do to be able to give to those in need. We even work hard for people we don't agree with.

**Don't use my words to tear others down but to build others up.**

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.  
Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

As Christians, we are to keep corrupting talk from coming out of our mouth. The word corrupting means rotten. It is used to describe maggot-infested road kill. Anything that doesn't build people up should not be part of our speech. If you are thinking of saying something and it won't build people up, don't say it. Will what you say propel people closer to Jesus or farther away from Jesus? Don't use words that hurt, injure or wound. The test is not just, "Are these words hurtful, but are they helpful?" If they aren't the kind of words Jesus would use, don't use them.

Many of us love to blow off steam. We love to whine and complain and tell people, under the guise of fellowship, all the problems in our lives and in the lives of others. When God hears negative speech, it is repulsive to him. When that happens in your house this week, I give permission to tell one another they have maggot breath. They have rotten mouth. In conflict and out of conflict our words are to build people up, not tear them down. Off-color jokes, profanity, swearing,

whining, and fits of rage all fail to honor God in a conflict. When they happen, and they will happen, we repent of them to God and to those we hurt.

**How do I change my mouth?** We call out to God and ask him to help us change.

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! Psalm 141:3 (ESV)

The other thing we do is what we learned two weeks ago. Examine what we are thinking about that leads our mouths to sin. What comes out of our mouths is just what was in our hearts.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 (ESV)

**What about correction?** If our words are to only build people up, does that mean we can't correct people? Corrections of direction doesn't always feel like it builds people up. Of course we can correct people. Correcting people is one of the ways we love people. The key is how we correct people. Do we seek to build people up or tear them down in the way we correct them?

The real issue is that when our mouths tear people down, we don't just hurt people, we grieve the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)

Tearing others down with our words grieves God. Most of us do not realize how much God cares about our words.

## Conflict is an opportunity for the downward spiral of sin or to live the gospel.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Ephesians 4:31 (ESV)

We often wonder why God allows conflict into our lives. Why do those irritating people never go away? Why doesn't God take them away? Conflict is one of the most powerful ways to show others that Christ makes a real difference. The natural path of conflict follows this pattern.

1. **Bitterness** — This is when we don't deal with an issue but we sit on it. We think about it. We replay the tape. We become a bitter person.
2. **Wrath** — After sitting on a conflict, the pressure begins to build. Our blood pressure starts to rise. We become like a volcano. We are pressurized and ready to erupt.
3. **Anger** — The pressure of the wrath inside of us bursts like a balloon on other people. It can hurt, like a volcanic eruption, the person who hurt us as we just ream them out for how they hurt us. We can also have mini eruptions on the people we love. We have disproportionate responses to the way our children irritate us or the way our wives irritates us. Those are signs someone has bitterness and wrath inside.
4. **Clamor** — This means stirring up public controversy. Instead of just venting our anger at the person that sinned against us, we get on the phone and tell other people about it. We gossip. We try to build camps so we feel better



about ourselves and get other people on our side. Now we are dividing the church. We are dividing the family. It is way beyond us. This is serious sin.

5. **Slander** — Now we move from stirring up controversy with others based on information that is true; now we begin stirring up controversy with others based on information that might be true. We are making things up. We are assuming people have the worst motive. We are assuming people's actions. Bitterness is now rotting us from the inside out.

6. **Malice** — Malice is an evil mind. This is anything our sick, demented minds can conceive of to hurt another person. You don't care what it costs or how long it takes. You don't care about the consequences. You just want your enemy to suffer. This is people suing each other in hopes of bankrupting them. This is a very sick or demented person to be around. They are irrational and wicked. It is where things go in any conflict unless we forgive people and forgive them quickly. This is the way of the world. Christians do not handle their conflicts this way.

Rather than conflict leading you to become a bitter, wicked person, as Christians, every conflict is a chance to preach the gospel and to treat others the way Christ treats us. This is the way we are to treat those we have a conflict with.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

Christ is incredibly kind and tender-hearted toward us. Christ is gentle toward us, not wrathful and violent. We were God's enemies. God didn't get bitter toward us. He didn't get malicious toward us. He treated us with kindness

and sent his son to forgive us. We are to treat our enemies the same way God treated us when we were his enemies. We are to be kind, compassionate and forgiving. In so doing, the gospel is tasted by others through the way we treat them in conflict.

I know some of you think this is OK in theory. You believe forgiveness is appropriate for some people, but in your situation, the wrong done to you was too wicked. It was too heinous. You refuse to forgive. To those of you who feel this way, I have some words. They are strong words. They come from the mouth of Jesus.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14–15 (ESV)

Forgiveness, not bitterness, anger, building camps, slander and malicious behavior, is the only way forward. Use our conflicts to preach the gospel to those we were hurt by. If we refuse to be forgiving of others and turn away from the downward spiral of bitterness, it may be because we don't even know the gospel.

## Conclusion

This week, in conflicts:

1. Speak the truth and don't lie.
2. When I am angry, work it out as soon as I can. Don't stuff it.
3. Don't try to steal from others. Try to give to those in need.
4. Don't use my words to hurt but to help.
5. Don't slide down the spiral of bitterness. Forgive people like Christ forgave me. When I do, I am living the gospel.





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