



We are continuing our series, “Building a Home: One Room at a Time,” and can you guess what room we are in? Yes, you got it—The Doghouse! Raise your hands if you have ever spent some time in this place! Raise your hands if you are there now! If you are unfamiliar with this wonderful house, let me explain. According to Webster’s Dictionary the Doghouse is “a state of disfavor. A bad situation where someone is angry with you.” The Urban Dictionary says, it’s “where you are figuratively when you’re on bad terms with your spouse or loved one.”

Being in the doghouse is all about conflict. We are going to talk about that today because conflict in the home is inevitable. No family and no relationships are immune. When dealt with biblically, conflict can be used as a catalyst for deep change and an opportunity for both spiritual and relational growth. If we believe that, why are we afraid to tell our friend why her words hurt us? Why is it hard to ask our boss for a raise? Why do we shy away from confronting a family member about how his actions are hurting his family?

I’ve learned that when it comes to conflict, there are usually three types of people. The first is someone who thrives on conflict. We’ll call them drama queens. You know someone like that? They are always stirring something up because they need conflict to survive. At the other extreme there are those who are conflict avoiders. They hate conflict with every fabric of their being. Harmony and peace are high values for them. And the rest of us fall somewhere in between. No one enjoys dealing with conflict. Some of us are just plain bad at it. To help us, we are going to look at what the Bible says about conflict resolution. We’ll first learn where conflict comes from and then we’ll learn how to deal with it biblically. Look with me at James 4:1–2.

### **Where Does Conflict Come From?**

**What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.**

James is not writing to those out there; he is writing to Christians. Apparently in his church there was major conflict, fights and quarrels. If things were peachy, he wouldn’t need to address them. James wants to pinpoint the source of their conflict. What causes conflict? Conflict comes from the desires that battle in our hearts. The word “desire” is an interesting word in the original

language meaning pleasure. We get the English word *hedonism* from it. James is saying this, conflict comes because the desires/pleasures of this world are constantly battling within you. We have desires that want to love God and please him and desires that want to be selfish.

Apostle Paul talks about this fight going on within us. In Romans 7:15 he writes, *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”* Did you feel that this week? I sure did. Paul continues his explanation of this struggle a few verses later, *“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (verses 21–25).

Someone once said it’s like there are two dogs fighting within us. The old dog, the sinful nature, the flesh, are at odds with the new man, the Holy Spirit and our desire to live for God. Who wins? The dog we feed the most. James adds, if these worldly desires go unchecked, if they are not dealt with, he says they will eventually lead to murder. That is what he says. Conflict come from the desires that battle in our hearts. Which desires, which dog, are you feeding more?

In my own marriage I saw this at work early on. Missy and I dated for about a year and had a 6-month engagement. We didn’t really fight or have any conflict as a dating couple. Like most dating or engaged couples we were experiencing the bliss of being madly in love and dreaming about our life together. Some of the things that bothered me about her I just shrugged off as cute and not important. Then we got married and started to live together. And to my surprise those things I thought were no big deal became areas of conflict. Like when it came to using the toothpaste, I realized we were very different. There are toothpaste rollers who efficiently roll all the toothpaste out of the tube keeping it nice and tight. How many of you are like that? Then there are toothpaste anarchists who grab and squeeze anywhere. How many of you are like that? I won’t tell you which one was me or my wife! One of our first conflicts was all about toothpaste squeezing methods. I laid out my argument and presented it like a good lawyer. To which she responded, “Really, it’s just a tube of

toothpaste." What I wanted was for Missy to do it **my** way, the right way. My selfish desires could see no other possibility until I realized just how ridiculous I was being. So, you know what we did? We bought another tube of toothpaste and I had mine and she had hers, problem solved! Twelve years and three kids later and I'm lucky just to find a tube of toothpaste somewhere in the house! I know that is a silly example, but it was the beginning of us learning how to resolve conflict as a young couple and trust me, we are still learning.

Before we move on, I don't want us to miss one more important thing James tells us about dealing with conflict. In verse 2b he says, **"You do not have because you do not ask God."** He's reminding us about the importance of prayer when handling conflict. Aristotle said it well, "Anyone can become angry. That is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way—that is not easy." Handling conflict is never easy. But, if we can find the space to slow down, take a step back and talk to the Lord about the issue, we'll take a huge step forward in dealing with conflict biblically and with the right heart. Prayer is not about getting God to change your spouse, your kids, or your boss; prayer is about changing you. Prayer is submitting ourselves to the Lord and asking for his wisdom and getting his grace about the issue at hand. What conflict are you dealing with? It seems obvious but, have you prayed about it? Have you asked God to work in and through it? Have you asked God to deal with you first? That's one way to start dealing with conflict. Let's look at three others. Turn to 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1.

### **How Do We Deal with Conflict?**

**So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.**

**Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**

#### **See conflict as an opportunity<sup>1</sup>**

In order to handle conflict well you must first have the right perspective. Conflict can be an opportunity for spiritual and relational growth. Some of us have been raised to believe that conflict is bad, but it's not. Think about the last conflict you had. Maybe it was an argument with someone in your family. Maybe it was a fight with your spouse. If you were able to work through it, is your relationship with the other person stronger and more healthy? Most often, it is, especially if it was handled biblically. I think about all the fights and issues I've had with my wife, kids and friends. Most of them (not all) were opportunities for deep spiritual and relational growth. When I have to apologize and own up to my mistakes, humility is developed in

me. When I am forced to see my sin, I become more thankful of the love Jesus has for me. God in his grace uses my marriage and parenting to be the primary sources for my sanctification, and for that I am grateful.

Apostle Paul wanted the church in Corinth to see conflict as an opportunity. I don't have time to go into details but basically the issue for the church in Corinth at that time had to do with what Gentiles, non-Jews, were eating. Jewish believers did not eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. The Ten Commandments warned against idolatry. However, most Gentiles had no problem eating the meat. In fact, most of the meat available in the city of Corinth was most likely offered to an idol before it was eaten. You can see how this was a problem for church potlucks. Today, there are many different issues we face as Christians and as a church that are much more relevant than idol meat. Should a Christian do yoga or read a Harry Potter book for example? How should the church deal with this major issue? Paul makes three points.

First, see conflict as an opportunity to glorify God, **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."** According to Paul, anything short of sin can be done for the glory of God. You can eat or drink for God's glory! *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks in question one, "What is the chief end of man?" In other words, What is our purpose in life? Answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." Paul and *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* agree—whatever you do or say in life, no matter how insignificant or large, can be done for God's glory. That means people should be able to look at how we handle conflict and see that we are God's people. There should be a striking difference between how God's people and the rest of the world deal with conflict. I've found that it's only when we are in a right relationship with Jesus that we can glorify him in all we do and say. If this relationship is messed up, these relationships are too. To glorify God means to make much of him, to honor him, to allow his name to shine. You can glorify God through conflict.

Second, see conflict as an opportunity to serve others in love, **"Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."** The overriding principle Paul wants the believers in Corinth to grasp is love matters more than being right. Love matters more than winning an argument. Love matters more than toothpaste. By God's grace you can use conflict to serve others by bearing their burdens. When you seek to understand someone's position you show your love and care for them. Even when you have to confront someone, if done with truth and grace, you are serving them in love.

Third, see conflict as an opportunity to grow in Christlikeness, **"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."** At the

end of the day, we want to follow the example of Jesus. In every conflict, we want to ask the question, like the bracelets, “What would Jesus do?” Whether the conflict is over idol meat or something else, Paul wants us to ask three questions—How can I glorify God? How can I serve them in love? How will God grow me more like his Son? If we can see conflict as an opportunity, we are less likely to dig in our heels to win the argument and in turn lose the relationship. Conflict can be an opportunity for growth.

### Get the log out of your own eye

A second principle in dealing with conflict is getting the log out of our own eye. Jesus challenges us in Matthew 7:5 and says, *“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”* When it comes to conflict, what “logs” do we need to deal with? I’ll mention two. First, it’s the log of attitude. Whenever we are in a conflict, we should ask ourselves, “Have I had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict?” Sometimes I just get into a funk and look for a fight. My wife and I have been married long enough now and when I get in that funky mood, she’ll look at me and say, “Really? Cut it out.” And she’s right! It’s so easy to have a critical and negative attitude because it’s never our fault.

The second “log” is the log of sinful words and actions. Truth is, we all are self-deceived. We all have blind spots. How many times have you been in a conflict where you were totally blind to how you contributed to it? Because of this we need the advice of a godly friend who will help us look objectively at ourselves and our contribution to the conflict. Do you have someone in your life that has the guts to say, “You are wrong. You need to go apologize”? If you are currently dealing with a conflict, what logs do you need to pull out? Confess that sin and take the right steps to be reconciled.

Pastor Andy Stanley in a sermon title “Let the Blames Begin” says:

“I used to do a lot of marriage counseling, and often one spouse would come in the office and start ranting and raving, ‘My husband does this...;’ ‘My wife never will do that...;’ and it would go on and on. I would sit there thinking, This counseling isn’t going to be very effective, because the person who apparently needs to change isn’t even in the room. So I would get a pad of paper, draw a circle on it, and say, ‘This is a pie that represents all the chaos in your marriage. Now, 100 percent of the blame is in that pie, because that’s where all the chaos is.’ I would give them the pen and say, ‘I want you to draw a slice of pie that you think represents your responsibility for the chaos.’ The piece of pie that that client would draw was never very big, but I would say, ‘Okay. So why don’t you and I talk about just this. Let’s talk about this piece that is your responsibility. Let’s talk about your slice.’ You know

what? My approach never worked. I could never get anybody to stay on his or her slice of the pie.”

Andy continues, “So here is what I want you to do this week: As you experience relational conflict at work, at home, with your friends—any conflict of any sort, big or small—stop and think about your own slice of the pie. Ask yourself, What is in my slice of the pie? Have I taken responsibility for my life, really, or am I enjoying the blame game so much that it has allowed me to ignore what I am ultimately responsible for?”

In any relationship, if you can ever get the two parties to own their piece of the pie, you can make progress. But if everybody is focused on the other person’s slice of the pie, you will just have chaos.”<sup>2</sup>

Own your slice of the pie. Get the log out of your own eye. Finally, once you’ve prayed, looked for ways to see the conflict as an opportunity to glorify God, love others and grow like Christ. Once you’ve owned your slice of the conflict pie, then you can work toward gentle restoration.

### Gently restore

Matthew 18:15, a classic text on conflict says, *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”* Resolving conflict requires an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to the conflict. But, we need to walk carefully. Jesus does not want us to go toe to toe with someone about their sin. In context, the preceding passage is about a loving shepherd who goes out to look for the one wandering sheep. The following passage is about the unmerciful servant who doesn’t forgive the debt of his fellow servant. The point is clear—ultimately in conflict we want to work towards restoration, not condemnation. We want to display the grace and mercy of God at all times.

Notice Jesus tells us to go directly to the person we have an issue with. We don’t need to put it out on the prayer chain, we shouldn’t gossip about them; we deal with it as two people in Christ, one on one. If they don’t listen, then you bring one other person. If they don’t listen again, then you bring it to the leaders of the church. Galatians 6:1 says, *“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”* The goal for conflict is the restoration of the relationship.

In a 2011 *Leadership Journal* article, Gordon MacDonald shares the moving story about his friends, Dr. Paul and Edith Rees. When the Rees’ were in their 90s, MacDonald asked if they still fought after 60-plus years of marriage:

“Oh, sure we do,” Dr. Rees responded. “Yesterday morning was a case in point. Edith and I were in our car, and she was

driving. She failed to stop at a stop sign, and it scared me half to death."

"So what did you do?" MacDonald asked.

"Well, I've loved Edith for all these years, and I have learned how to say hard things to her. But I must be careful because when Edith was a little girl, her father always spoke to her harshly. And today when she hears a manly voice speak in anger—even my voice—she is deeply, deeply hurt."

"But, Paul," MacDonald said, "Edith is 90 years old. Are you telling me that she remembers a harsh voice that many years ago?"

"She remembers that voice more than ever," Rees said.

MacDonald asked, "So how do you handle that driving situation from the other day?"

"Ah," he said, "I simply said, 'Edith, darling, after we've had our nap this afternoon, I want to discuss a thought I have for you.'" And when the nap was over I did. I was calm; she was ready to listen, and we solved our little problem."

MacDonald concluded: "These are the words of a man who has learned that conflict is necessary, can be productive, but must be managed with wisdom and grace. By the time I reach 90, I hope to be just like him."<sup>3</sup>

I hope to be like him too!

I've been reading a great book this week by Gary Chapman, *Everybody Wins: The Chapman Guide to Solving Conflicts Without Arguing*. Chapman's bottom line is this, "Conflict resolution requires listening, listening leads to understanding, understanding leads to resolution, and resolution leads to harmony." When you get into the doghouse, listening and understanding are your way out.

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<sup>1</sup> These three points come from, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande

<sup>2</sup> from the sermon, *Let the Blames Begin* by Andy Stanley

<sup>3</sup> Gordon MacDonald, "When Bad Things Happen to Good Relationships," *Leadership Journal* (Winter 2011)

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*