



CENTER OF CONFLICT

The heart's central role in conflict is vividly described in James 4:1-3. If you understand this passage, you will have found a key to preventing and resolving conflict.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

This passage describes the center of destructive conflict in a progressive fashion.

1. DESIRE

Conflict always begins with some kind of desire. Some desires are wrong, but others are not wrong in and of themselves. However, every desire we have puts us at a crossroads. On the one hand, you can trust God and seek your fulfillment in Him (Psalm 73:25). On the other hand, you can dwell on your disappointment if your desire is left unmet and allow that desire to begin to control your life. At the very least, it can involve self-pity and bitterness. It becomes a downward spiral.

2. DEMAND

Unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts. This is especially true when we come to see a desire as something we need or deserve, and therefore must have in order to be happy or fulfilled. It is easy to fall into a vicious cycle in this stage. The more we want something, the more we think of it as something we need or deserve. The more we think we are entitled to it, the more convinced we are that we cannot be happy and secure with it.

When we see our object of desire as being essential to our fulfillment and well-being, it moves from being a desire to a demand. This is where the trouble sets in. As Martin

Luther wrote: “To whatever we look for any good thing and for refuge in any need that is what is meant by ‘god.’ “

In this way, every sincere Christian struggles with idolatry. At times we all allow other influences to rule us – rather than God. Idols can arise from good desires as well as evil desires. It is often not what we want that is the problem, but that we want it too much.

-What are you preoccupied with?

-Where do you put your trust?

-What do you fear?

-When a certain desire is not met, do you feel frustration or anger?

-Is there something you desire so much that you are willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?

For example, a mother may desire that her children be respectful and obedient to her, kind to one another, and diligent in developing their gifts and talents (all good things.) If her desires remain God-centered, her response to disobedient children should be characterized by God’s actions towards her when she is disobedient in her own Christian life. The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love (Psalm 103:8).

On the other hand, if her desire for comfort has taken over, her reaction to her children will be much different. She will be harsh and use hurtful words. Even after exercising discipline, she may feel bitterness or resentment that her desires have been frustrated.

3. HERE COMES THE JUDGE

The inclination to judge others is a natural one indeed. Dave Powlison writes: “We judge others-criticize, nit-pick, nag, attack, condemn – because we literally play God. In this, we become like the devil himself. We act like the adversary who seeks to usurp God’s throne and plays the part of the accuser of the brethren.”

This is an insight that should leave us shaking in our boots! When we judge others and condemn them in our hearts for not meeting our desires, we are imitating the Devil (see James 3:15; 4:7). This is a formula for excruciating conflict. This does not mean that there is no place for discernment in the Christian life. However, we cross the line when we exercise a feeling of superiority, indignation, condemnation, bitterness, or resentment. Why? We are speculating on others motives.

It becomes very easy to assume the attitude: “After all I have done for you, is it too much to ask that you _____?” Inflicting pain on others is one of the surest signs that an idol is ruling our hearts. When we catch ourselves punishing others in any way, whether deliberately and overtly or unconsciously and subtly, it is a warning that something other than God is ruling our hearts.

4. THE WAY OUT

John Piper says that “sin is what you do when you are not fully satisfied in God.” In order to correct our ways of conflict, we must:

Repent before God: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17)

Fear God: Stand in awe of the true God when you are tempted to fear others or are afraid of losing something precious.

Love God: Desire the One who forgives us and provides everything we need instead of looking to other things that cannot save you.

Trust God: “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man (Psalm 118:8).

Delight in God: Find your greatest joy in thinking about God, meditating on His works, talking to others about Him, praising Him, and giving Him thanks.