

Flint Hills Bible Church
Biblical Soul Care Sunday School
Resolving Conflict Chapter 6: Love Communicates

I. Introduction

According to Scripture, what are some of the defining traits of a Christian?

John 13:34-35

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

1. What is Jesus saying here? What are the implications of this commandment?

It is interesting to see the response of the disciples to what Jesus said in these verses. In thinking about our topic this morning, I have often just read through passages like this one without deep study or thought. I wonder if this is one more way that I am like the disciples who just didn't get the gravity of what Jesus is saying at that moment.

1 John 3:10-18, 4: 7-12

The implications for those of us who are believers are many. When we love like this, it influences the way we talk to one another, pray for one another, think about one another, serve one another the way we worship here together on a Sunday morning, and yes, how we resolve conflicts between one another.

In today's lesson we are going to examine the different reasons that people can sinfully communicate - or sinfully refuse to communicate when conflict comes.

Then, next week we will consider 6 Biblical principles for dealing with this conflict resolution challenge.

II. The Cause of the Silent Treatment

A focus of this chapter in Lou Priolo's book is how we demonstrate a lack of love when we refuse to talk through conflict biblically. It is fairly easy to see when someone is sinfully speaking. The language, tone of voice, content of what they are saying are pretty good indicators of whether or not they are engaging in sinful speech. It is not as obvious though, why people refrain from speaking in a conflict. Most often, when one or both sides of a conflict revert to silence in a conflict, it is due to selfishness. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

2. Give some examples of how the attitudes and behaviors in this "vice list" all boil down to selfishness and self love?
3. For our purposes in this class, consider the word *irreconcilable*. How does this trait demonstrate a selfish heart?

"What is selfishness? It is the opposite of 1 Corinthians 13 love. Love is giving...it is more concerned with what it can give than with what it can get. Selfishness is taking-it is more concerned with what it can get...that with what it can give." pg. 144

Selfishness is a root cause of all sorts of sinful behavior. It definitely affects the ways that we resolve conflict. Scripture tells us what we must do to battle this selfishness in our hearts. Matthew 22:35-40

4. How do these commandments counter our selfishness?

"These two great commandments, on which all the others depend, are the two greatest practical antidotes for indwelling sin. The more you and I love God and our neighbors, the less selfish (sinful) we will be."

Now as we continue this lesson we are going to be evaluating our responses to conflict in light of these two commands - Love for God, Love for Neighbor. Specifically, how can the strategy of clamming up in conflict reveal a selfishness in the heart?

It is also important to consider when we need to be silent, and when we should continue to resolve conflict. There are times when it is necessary to lovingly refrain from speaking, or to pause a conflict. But we must be careful that we are not simply withdrawing from a necessary conflict for selfish reasons. And usually, there will be a time when we need to re-engage the person to resolve the conflict at a later time.

Being silent during a conflict is to stop all progress toward the resolution. It is withdrawing oneself from the process of conflict resolution. If we do this, we need to have a good, biblical, Christ exalting reason.

In the next portion of our lesson we are going to examine some sinful motivations for silence that Lou Priolo highlights in chapter 6.

A. Jealousy or Envy

James 3:13-18

Lou Priolo gives these helpful definitions of jealousy and envy on page 147:

Envy is zeal for that which has been given to another.

Jealousy is zeal for that which has been given to me.

Scenario: Last month, Doug and Ricky were both in the running for a promotion at work. When it was awarded to Ricky, their relationship suddenly became cold and secretive. Everyone in the office knows things are not going well, but the two men aren't doing anything about it.

5. Which man would be tempted toward jealousy and which one would be tempted toward envy?

6. How might one man's jealousy make him avoid resolving the office conflict?

7. How might envy in the other man prevent the resolution of the conflict?

8. Is jealousy always sinful?

Exodus 34: 11-16

9. When would it be appropriate to be jealous?

Questions to gauge jealousy

- Am I afraid of losing something that I deem important or valuable?
- Am I afraid of losing something that God deems important or valuable?
- Am I more afraid that those whom I love (or my opponent) will somehow displace me than I am that they will displace the Lord?

B. Selfish Ambition

Selfish ambition is a focus only on today and how I can get ahead. There is not a consideration of the future, let alone eternal things.

10. Returning to Doug and Ricky, how might selfish ambition get in the way of resolving conflict?

Questions to gauge selfish ambition

- Am I seeking my own interests right now or those of Jesus christ?
- In what ways can I esteem my opponent to be better than I am in this matter?
- How am I going to respond if the conversation begins to go in a different direction that I would like?
- How willing am I to invest the time effort, and energy needed to minister to my opponent should his needs become apparent?

C. Empty Conceit

Philippians 2:3

Empty conceit is speaking or acting in ways that elevate yourself or your reputation higher than it ought to be.

11. When might we be tempted to indulge in empty conceit?
12. Why is it unloving to be conceited? What's the harm?

Questions to gauge empty conceit

- To what extent am I exaggerating my virtues (boasting) in order to impress my opponent?
- To what extent am I minimizing my flaws in order to impress my opponent?
- Am I fighting more for my own reputation or for the Lord's?

D. Fear

Fear is a life dominating emotion. Fear can lead to a whole host of sinful choices in our lives and relationships. Priolo notes biblical connections between fear and selfishness as well as between fear and laziness.

Fear and selfishness (the opposite of love)

1 John 4:18

13. What is lacking in our lives when we allow our fear to hinder our communication?

14. How could you use this text to counsel someone who is fearful of a coming conflict?

“People who are selfish tend to be fearful. People who are fearful are necessarily selfish. Selfishness is more concerned with what it might lose than with what it can give.”

Fear and laziness:

Matthew 25:24-26 Parable of the slothful servant

15. What is the point of this parable?

16. What kept the servant from doing his job?

There are many reasons that a person might refrain from conflict due to fear. There is a very helpful chart on pages 150-151 that gives a side by side comparison of a fearful response vs. a loving response.

Scenario: Larry is feeling some conviction to share the gospel with a coworker William. When they are engaging in conversation, it is clear that William considers himself to be a great man, even though he is lazy and can display outbursts of anger when things don't go his way.

17. What are some possible reasons for Larry's fear in talking with William?

18. How could love for William help Larry overcome this fear?

“A peacemaker (a God-pleaser) is more concerned about fulfilling his God-given responsibilities or meeting the needs of others than he is about the potential consequences of a particular action...he doesn't allow the thought of unpleasant consequences to paralyze him or keep him from loving God and loving others-especially in times of conflict.” pg. 151

Questions to gauge fear in conflict

- Am I in genuine danger here or am I only uncomfortable?
- Am I more concerned about what I might lose if I continue in this conflict, or with what I can give to my opponent?
- To what extent am I reluctant to reveal myself to my opponent due to the fear that, if I disclose certain things, I will lose his respect or face his rejection?
- How will the information that I want to withhold from him benefit him?

E. Vengeance

“Sometimes people in conflict purposely shut down in order to “pay back” their opponents. But the Bible forbids us from taking our own vengeance. “Pg 152

Romans 12:19

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Scenario: Sheldon and his wife Betsy are experiencing a lot of conflict in their marriage. Betsy is concerned with how Sheldon spends money. When the topic comes up, Sheldon often becomes visibly irritated and won't say anything beyond short one word responses to Betsy's questions.

19. How could Sheldon be demonstrating a desire for vengeance?

20. What is the result of Sheldon's behavior on their marriage?

Questions for gauging desire for Vengeance

- Has my opponent really sinned against me, or am I just upset because things aren't going my way?
- Did I do anything wrong that might have provoked my opponent's improper response?
- Am I harboring bitterness or resentment in my heart toward my opponent?
- How can I bless my opponent even in the midst of our disagreement? (What are his needs? What resources do I have with which to meet them?)

F. The Love of Pleasure

Scenario: Whitney and her new roommate Virginia are getting into arguments over chores and other responsibilities. Virginia simply does not understand what is so important and all of these arrangements and rules and quickly ends the conversations by returning to her book or Netflix series - thoroughly frustrating Whitney.

21. How are Whitney and Virginia demonstrating selfishness?

22. How is Virginia demonstrating a love of pleasure rather than a love of God and neighbor?

Questions to gauge love of pleasure

- Does God really want me to focus my attention right now on what I would like to, or does He want me to give this person my undivided attention?
- Would it be best for me to politely ask for a “rain check” until such a time as I will be able to give this person a great portion of my undivided attention?

G. The Love of Control

The love of control can affect anyone in a particular conflict. Consider a parent and child relationship. How can the following parties display a love for control rather than a love for God and others:

Father:

Mother:

Child:

Questions to gauge love of control

- Have I asked my opponent for precisely what I want, or am I selfishly pressuring him into giving me what I want?
- Am I prepared to take ‘no’ for an answer should I not be able to persuade him to give me what I want?
- Am I content in not having persuaded him to my way of thinking because I refused to resort to sinful ways of doing so?

H. Contempt for Authority

Page 156:

Our bosses, leaders and authorities are placed by God and they exercise their authority over us. We must respect and honor them knowing that God will hold us accountable for how we did so, just as he will hold them accountable for how they wielded their God-given authority.

Questions to gauge contempt for authority

- Does this person have a biblical right to the information I want to conceal from him?
- What is making me hesitate to provide him with that information
- Is my contempt for this individual tempting me to be unnecessarily provocative?

I. Malice

“Some people are just intent upon doing evil...It may be hard for you to imagine, but some people find evil pleasure in hurting, belittling, and humiliating others.”

How might we see this truth played out with school children?

Do we engage in this malicious behavior in an attempt to embarrass, frustrate, provoke, intimidate, or annoy someone around us?

J. A Condescending, Critical, Unkind Spirit

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7

23. What are some implications of this text on biblical conflict resolution?

Summary:

“In the final analysis, if we do not understand that we have a biblical responsibility to communicate in the midst of conflicts- If we are not convicted that in most circumstances it is unbiblical to refuse to communicate (even if the communication is only to politely ask for a “rain check”) - then we will be slow to change our style of communication.

In part 2 we will examine biblical principles to guide our loving communication in the midst of conflict.