

Handling Conflict God's Way, part 2
Ephesians 4:23-29

- I. We're continuing from where we left off last week – talking about God's Way of Handling Conflict in the Church.
 - a. Here's a quick review of what we talked about last week:
 - i. Be completely humble and gentle.
 - ii. Be patient.
 - iii. Speak the truth in love.
 - iv. Put off your old self.
 - b. Today we move deeper into Ephesians 4 to find four more things to add to that list.
 - i. As we do that, let's be reminded that God has a way of responding in the face of conflict that is decidedly different than our natural inclinations might lead us.
 1. It's curious to me that Paul seems to take conflict as a given. Nowhere does he say, "Don't have conflict."
 2. He only says, "Here's how you handle conflict."
 - ii. For those who follow Christ, care needs to be taken in our words, actions, and motives.
 1. Crisis time, conflict time, will be the time when those outside the church community look at us the closest.
 2. We need to consider our attitudes and our actions.
 - c. Last week we talked about some attitudinal stances we should take in the face of conflict – how to harness our minds. Today we begin in the same way and then talk about some specific things we can do that will make a difference – how to harness our words and deeds.
- II. First, be made new in the attitude of your minds.
 - a. Your attitude will go far in determining your behavior.
 - i. If you have a positive attitude you are more likely to react positively – even in bad situations.
 - ii. Most often, your behavior flows from your attitude.
 - b. Attitude is about orientation.
 - i. Toward who or what is your life oriented?
 - ii. Who do you want your life to point toward?
 - c. Attitude is about balance.
 - i. Attitude is the position of the wings in flight. If the attitude is right then the wings are in the proper position relative to the ground.
 - ii. Even in the face of winds, storms, and mechanical problems, it's the pilots job to adjust so that attitude of the wings remains in the proper balance.
 - d. When Ephesians 4:23 says, ""to be made new in the attitude of your minds," its talking about this orientation and balance.
 - i. Toward what is your life/your responses/ your behavior oriented?
 - ii. If your life (your behavior) is oriented toward God then your responses in conflict filled situations will reflect that.
 - iii. Does your life demonstrate balance?
 1. I think of this in largely emotional terms.
 2. When conflict comes, do you find yourself angry, then brooding?
Too charged up to think through what you say before you say it?

3. Then you're out of balance – your attitude is out of balance and that attitude needs to be made new.
 - iv. This becomes a time to ask a valuable question:
 1. "What would Jesus have me do?"
 2. The degree to which we can ask this question and find an answer before we lose our temper or withdraw in the face of conflict – the more we will be able to handle it God's way.
 - v. Some practical steps you can take to have a new attitude?
 1. Check your orientation – Is pleasing Christ your sole motivation?
 2. Check your balance – are you solidly grounded and living in balance with God, yourself and others?
- III. Put on righteousness and holiness.
- a. Last week we said that we needed to put off our old self and put on our new self.
 - i. We compared it to simply changing clothes.
 1. You take one "self" off – it's old and needs replacing – and you put a new self on.
 2. What does that new self look like?
 - ii. The new self that we put on is full of righteousness and holiness.
 1. Righteousness is being in right relationship with God, with others and with yourself.
 - a. In times of conflict it means that we act and react as God would have us act and react.
 - b. It means that we make whole and complete relationships with others a priority – the relationship is more important than being right.
 2. Holiness is to be whole. To stand before God without sin, without deceit and without blemish.
 - a. In times of conflict it means acting as though God were watching your every move and every thought.
 - b. It means being very, very aware of your status as an ambassador for the king.
 - i. Just as an earthly ambassador represents his or her rulers to others.
 - ii. So we are Christ's ambassadors and represent Him to others.
 - b. Once again we can't do better than asking how Jesus dealt with similar circumstances in his own life and ministry.
 - i. Jesus teaching is certainly one guide – if he said "this" then we do "this."
 - ii. Jesus life and the way he treated people is another great guide – he made room in the community for outcasts and unworthy people so we make room for outcasts and unworthy people. {That's how we got in!}
 - c. When Ephesians [4:24] says, "and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" it is calling us to something powerful.
 - i. We are to be righteous and holy – created to be like God.
 1. Adam and Eve were deceived into believing they could be like God – with disastrous results.
 2. The people built the tower of Babel because they believed they could be like God – and languages split the world's people apart.
 - ii. To be holy and righteous as God is holy and righteous means that we are being made over into the image of God.

1. We do not become God.
2. But we become a reflection (a mirror) for others to see God.
3. When we live to become more like Christ – we are committing ourselves to being holy and righteous.

IV. The next two things have to do with using our tongues, not getting used by them. First, put off falsehood.

- a. This means more than just lying. In this context it means that you put aside your own biases and opinions long enough to look at a problem from someone else's perspective.
 - i. In the midst of conflict and the selfishness of those moments, this is hard to do.
 - ii. We're too close to the situation, too wrapped up in it to see it any other way than the way we saw it.
 - iii. There are always more than two sides.
 1. If you have 10 Methodists in the room you have 11 opinions.
 2. There's your side, their side and the side of the truth – which usually lies somewhere in the middle.
- b. How would a casual observer describe you in moments of conflict?
 - i. How would others in our church body describe you in moments of conflict?
 - ii. Do you bear up well and respond calmly or is your reaction more incendiary?
- c. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood, and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."
 - i. It's more than not lying.
 - ii. It also means truth telling.
 1. Sometimes we don't lie, but we stay silent.
 2. Staying silent and withholding the truth is lying, you are withholding truth.
 3. Paul uses the words "and speak truthfully" here.
 - a. Put off falsehood – do not lie.
 - b. Speak truthfully – do not withhold the truth.
- d. If you could see conflict through the eyes of someone else – do you think it would be different?
 - i. Which is more difficult – not lying or speaking truth.
 - ii. I think speaking truth is harder. We [the church] dance around the truth quite a bit.
 1. We don't want to hurt someone's feelings.
 2. We don't want to sound like a know-it-all.
 - iii. I think the church has a hard time with speaking the truth.
 1. Speaking the truth would require a level of honesty that most of us aren't ready for.
 2. But God is ready. God is ready today.

V. Forego unwholesome talk.

- a. This goes along with avoiding lies and being truthful.
- b. If we aren't lying – what kind of unwholesome talk is left?
 - i. Gossip – sharing someone else's stuff.
 1. Our goal is to bring down that person.
 2. And to elevate ourselves.
 - ii. Slander – damaging someone's reputation or standing in the community.
 1. Our goal is to bring down that person.

- 2. And to elevate ourselves.
 - iii. Idle talk – worthless chit chat for no real or beneficial purpose.
 - 1. A waste of time.
 - 2. Doesn't glorify God is God's people.
 - 3. God wants you [and your mouth] busy doing something.
 - c. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."
 - i. That's so other focused.
 - ii. There is almost no *me* in there at all.
 - iii. It's all about the other person, their needs, and their well-being.
- VI. Putting off falsehood, speaking truth and foregoing unwholesome talk all have to do with the ways that we use our tongues.
 - a. In this first practical application, Paul is telling us that our first troubles usually begin when our tongue gets out in front of our brain.
 - i. People have lost jobs, lost legal battles, alienated their families and just generally made fools of themselves when they have lost control of their tongues.
 - b. How can you tame your tongue?
 - i. Think back: cultivate humility, patience, and love.
 - ii. Put off your old self – put on your new self.
 - iii. Get your attitude adjusted.
 - c. When you get that in order, your tongue will lose its control over you and you will reassert control over your tongue.
 - d. James 3:3-5 says ³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. "
- VII. Handling conflict in the church requires a great deal of self-control and mutual submission to one another in love.
 - a. It is very difficult, but worthwhile.
 - b. If we can keep our tongues in check (use them instead of getting used by them).
 - c. If we can put God's purpose and the well-being of others first.
 - d. We will be well on our way to glorifying God -- even in the midst of conflict.