

Week 2

When Two Or Three Disagree

Conflict is inevitable, even among Christians. As an unbelieving world watches, it is imperative that believers distinguish themselves in the way they address conflict and promote peace. This week defines destructive conflict and constructive conflict and presents God's format for resolving conflict. The study digs deeply enough under conflict to pull out some of the subsurface issues that must be confronted.

You will study:

Day 1: Motives Matter

Day 2: Confront Sin

Day 3: Offer Grace

Day 4: Grow Up In Christ

Day 5: Preserve The Precious Gift of Unity

At the end of this week's study you will be able to:

- Identify what drives conflict between people in churches
- Define destructive and constructive conflict as the terms relate to churches
- Explore biblical methods of confrontation
- Analyze personal discomfort in confrontational situations
- Differentiate between mature and immature behaviors among believers
- Assess your personal inclination toward peacemaking
- Describe the type of peace that keeps congregations together when conflict surfaces

Key Scripture Passage

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful (Colossians 3:12-15).

Day 1: Motives Matter

The motives behind our actions matter to God. He cares little for our outward appearances but He cares intensely about the condition of our hearts. He searches our hearts – in places no one else can find – and He judges our actions according to what He finds there. God’s Word admonishes those with impure motives and exalts the upright of heart. Our course may seem right to us, but God weighs our motives: “*All a man’s ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart*” (Proverbs 21:2). Motives matter!

Behind every conflict lie human motives. To understand conflict we have to look at what motivates, or drives the conflict. The outcome of conflict is closely linked to the motives behind it. Since motives can be divided into two types – impure and pure – the conflict that arises from these motives can be described by outcomes or the fruit these motives bear.

We can find many examples of both types of conflict in the Bible. For purposes of this study, we have defined these types as destructive conflict and constructive conflict. It is motive that defines them and outcomes that separate them. Destructive conflict involves the outward expression of sinful desires – impure motives – that break fellowship with God and other people. Constructive conflict occurs as God’s people, with pure motives, address issues of biblical truth, doctrinal purity and church discipline. Thus, not all conflict is undesirable. But when conflict emanates from ungodly motivation, the destruction can be widespread. Only God’s direct intervention or His use of godly people can turn the devastating tide.

Destructive Conflict

Last week we learned to be on guard against Satan’s attempts to influence us to be unwitting accomplices in his attacks. If we don’t guard our hearts, and our deepest motives, we contribute to his devastation. When selfish and sinful demands ignore the needs of others, both the unity and effectiveness of our congregations are destroyed. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! The remedy for a sinful heart condition calls for preventative medicine – the right diagnosis of motive, confession, repentance, and undivided obedience to God’s Word.

❖ Read Psalm 139:23-24 in the margin then answer these questions.

1. How do you feel about God searching your heart right now?
 - I’ll take the full examination
 - Please, just call in a prescription
 - Sick? I’m not sick!
2. Why do you want God to search your heart? Check any that apply.
 - to penetrate it
 - to purify it
 - to protect it
 - to purge it

Search me, O God,
and know my heart;
test me and know my
anxious thoughts. See
if there is any
offensive way in me,
and lead me in the
way everlasting.

Psalm 139:23-24

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Psalm 139:1-3



Destructive Conflict involves the outward expression of sinful desires – impure motives – that break fellowship with God and other people.

3. Mark any of these “offensive ways” that may be in your heart right now.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> anger | <input type="checkbox"/> gossip | <input type="checkbox"/> unforgiveness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> jealousy | <input type="checkbox"/> wrong motive | <input type="checkbox"/> resentment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> selfishness | <input type="checkbox"/> greed | <input type="checkbox"/> bitterness |

Sometimes we can’t see the offensive ways in our hearts. That’s why we ask God to search our hearts, to penetrate to the deepest parts, expose our motives, make us pure, protect us from the enemy’s temptations, and get rid of anything that would destroy the unity within the body of believers or our own witness.

Destructive conflict permeated many aspects of congregational life in the church at Corinth. Paul urged the Corinthians to have no divisions among them, being “*perfectly united in mind and thought*” (1 Corinthians 1:10). He wanted their motives to be pure and their hearts to be united. Paul pleaded with two women in the church at Philippi “*to agree with each other in the Lord*” (Philippians 4:2). Presumably these two women were not in doctrinal error; their disagreement appears to be relational. They were serving Christ but remained unreconciled. One or both had to be nursing wrong attitudes, wrong motives. Their disagreement was affecting the spiritual life of the congregation. That’s why Paul brought it to the church’s attention.

An adult Bible study class wanted to help one of their ill members. Edith volunteered to plan and schedule meals to the member’s home. Janice brought her meal to the church as scheduled, but discovered on arriving that plans had been changed and her meal wasn’t needed. Irritated at the mistake, Janice confronted Edith. The confrontation escalated and soon the women wouldn’t speak to one another. After several attempts at reconciliation, Janice eventually gave up and settled for an embittered relationship. Pride kept Edith from desiring restoration in their friendship.

How unfortunate! What started out as a ministry effort ended in a long-term, smoldering conflict. A spirit of discord settles in when conflict is not resolved. Not only are relationships strained, the effectiveness of the church body is hindered. Our study will examine many cases of destructive conflict. We’ll see how God reveals the underlying motives that drive the conflict. This will help you identify the sources of conflict and find the best prescription for a cure!

Constructive Conflict

Destructive conflict is driven by ungodly motives and desires and is spread by contentious people. Constructive conflict is initiated by godly church leaders and members. While sometimes as unpleasant to experience as destructive conflict, constructive conflict may be necessary to preserve the integrity of the gospel and the purity and unity of Christ’s Church. This kind of conflict is constructive because of its motivation, methods and outcomes.

An example of constructive conflict occurring frequently in the New Testament involved the apostles' confrontation of false teachers. In Acts 15:2 Paul and Barnabas entered into a "*sharp dispute and debate*" with false teachers who had infiltrated the church at Antioch. Paul warned Timothy about those who advocated "*false doctrines*" and did not agree with the "*sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Timothy 6:3). In Galatians 2:4-5 Paul denounced the "*false brothers*" who sought to bring Christians into legalistic bondage. Peter warned the readers of his second epistle about false teachers among them who "*secretly introduce destructive heresies*" (2 Peter 2:1-3). Confrontation when properly motivated is one way believers protect the body of Christ. Consider the examples of constructive conflict below.



Constructive Conflict occurs as godly people proactively confront issues or people that threaten the integrity of the gospel or the purity and unity of Christ's Church.

❖ **Read the following verses in your Bible. Match the error being confronted in each verse.**

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| _____ 1. Romans 16:17-18 | a. teaching false doctrines |
| _____ 2. 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 | b. divisiveness |
| _____ 3. 1 Timothy 1:3-6 | c. sexual immorality |
| _____ 4. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 | d. foolish arguments or quarrels |
| _____ 5. Titus 3:9-11 | e. godlessness |

In each example, God's people were motivated by love to instruct and correct the church. The instruction would result in purifying the believers' lives. These church leaders were driven by a resolute commitment to the truth of the gospel and the spiritual health of their followers. Leaders are responsible to God to address error when it is discovered. *All believers* are responsible to address error. Constructive conflict is initiated by godly Christians who humbly and gently intervene where there is error.

❖ **Read the following biblical instructions and then answer the questions.**

Galatians 6:1 – "*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.*"

1. What should be our motivation when confronting someone who is in sin?
 - to demonstrate our spirituality
 - to point out their error
 - to restore them
2. How should we confront an erring believer?
 - boldly
 - gently
 - apologetically

3. What caution should we take when confronting?
- watch out for his/her reaction
 - watch out for others who are watching you
 - watch out for ourselves and our own motives

Matthew 18:15 – *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”*

1. When there is a conflict with a fellow believer, who should initiate the confrontation?
- the offending party
 - me
 - the pastor
2. How should the confrontation be initiated?
- private one-on-one conversation
 - in a small group setting, supported by your friends
 - at a church business meeting
3. What should be the content of your discussion?
- how much you want to be friends
 - your brother’s fault
 - how many sins you have committed
4. If properly motivated and properly handled, what can we expect from godly confrontation?
- we earn a badge
 - we gain a friend
 - we win a brother

God’s Strategy for Addressing Conflict

The God who created us knows our innermost thoughts and motives. He also knows how His children should resolve their difficulties. God’s Word offers a divine guideline for confronting all of our problems and conflicts.



What is God’s strategy for addressing church conflict? Confront it! – privately, gently, lovingly, prayerfully, and, if necessary, publicly.

What is God’s strategy for addressing church conflict? Confront it! – privately, gently, lovingly, prayerfully, and, if necessary, publicly. Understand ungodly attitudes, false teaching, divisiveness, and immorality for what they are – destructive!

Too many Christians avoid conflict by ignoring it or simply moving to another congregation. Others resort to resolving conflict with their own wisdom and methods. All of these approaches make problems worse, not better.

Christ is looking for Christians who are passionately committed to preserving the integrity, purity, and unity of His bride, the Church. He's seeking believers who will take a leadership role in confronting destructive conflict using the Bible as their guide, and their commitment to the health of their congregations as their motivation.

❖ **Answer these questions to summarize your understanding of today's study.**

1. Destructive conflict is rooted in
 - misunderstandings
 - impure motives
 - broken fellowship

2. The consequences of destructive conflict are
 - between God and Satan
 - broken fellowship with God and others
 - irreconcilable differences

3. Constructive conflict is rooted in
 - a building project gone awry
 - constructive criticism
 - pure motives

4. The outcomes of constructive conflict result in
 - hurt, anger, broken fellowship
 - preservation of the purity and unity of the church
 - sharp disputes and debate



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