



Lesson Goal:

For you to further your understanding and experience --

- ⇒ the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking
- ⇒ how destructive conflict infects your relationships
- ⇒ how the Father wants you to partner with Him in a ministry of reconciliation that glorifies Him



1. Listen to or watch the Lesson 15 talk.

Use the following transcript of the talk while you listen or watch.

Constructive Conflict

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The topic of this lecture is "Constructive Conflict." Is it possible? We all know destructive conflict is possible. We've all had experiences with destructive conflict, but the idea of constructive conflict is probably a little foreign to us.

1 I. INTRODUCTION

2 We almost assume automatically that conflict is bad and peacekeeping is where it
3 should be. It might be that peacekeeping and peacemaking are two different things. The
4 peace keeper is someone who tries to avoid conflict and often ends up in deeper conflict. The
5 peace maker is someone who has a view of the world where he or she takes into account that
6 life always involves struggle, and to be a servant to Jesus Christ in this world you have got to
7 fight like you have never fought before. You either fight or die. You would be surprised
8 when you go through the Bible how much of it is couched in fighting language, even in

9 Romans 6, where it speaks of the members of the body. It is actually “weapon” terminology.
10 As we come to talk about conflict, I would like to turn first to Luke 6:39-42 to show you the
11 paradoxical character of the kind of conflict the Lord wants to bring us into. Jesus is
12 speaking, **“Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A
13 student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his
14 teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no
15 attention to the plank in you own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let
16 me take the speck our to your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own
17 eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to
18 remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”** Luke 6:39-42

19 In James we find that destructive conflicts are fueled by selfish ambition and envy.
20 **“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds
21 done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish
22 ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not
23 come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy
24 and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that
25 comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of
26 mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a
27 harvest of righteousness.”** James 4:13-18 Very encouraging passage if you read it the right way.
28 Peacemakers who sow in peace will reap a harvest of righteousness.

29 II. WHAT IS CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT?

30 A. Desiring God’s Glory

31 What is constructive conflict? Would it be conflict that would be painless? Would it be
32 conflict that would be planned? Would it be something that springs at you and you suddenly
33 know how to do it? What is it? One of the things about it that makes it constructive is the self-
34 conscious desire to put all your energy in seeing God glorified in your life and the lives of
35 others. The standard, which I think you can use for this, is that what you are aiming at in the
36 glory of God is the difference between what you would naturally do and what you would do by
37 grace. That difference is the glory of God. What you would naturally do would be have
38 destructive conflicts, and what you do by grace is God’s honor. It is an amazing difference. It
39 advertises what you couldn’t do and what God did in you and through you. Then it would be
40 true of your Christian friend, if this person you are discipling or someone who you have a close
41 relationship, as you help them enter into constructive conflict. The difference between what they

42 do by nature and what they do by grace is God's glory. We could apply that to non-Christians
43 too. We see them now as they are when we engage in conflict with them at one time or another.
44 What are we going to do? We are going to glorify God. When we see the before and the after,
45 the glory of God will be in the change. We want to be very careful to keep lifting that up before
46 ourselves because it is that which emphasizes to us and non-believers the glory of the gospel.
47 That is specifically the message because the message is God's weapon for effectiveness through
48 prayer. The heart of it then, to state it very positively, is especially to bring out the power of
49 God's love. That is what reveals the difference where naturally we are lovers of ourselves not
50 lovers of others. We are naturally self-centered, and if that is what makes us mean or cruel, or
51 whatever we may be at a given moment. The breaking of that enables us to live a life of love.

52 **B. Mounting a Love Offensive**

53 The heart of our conflict is a love offensive in relationship to others. It is this that honors
54 God. The thing that reaches the conscience in the other person is what reached my conscience.
55 What reached my conscience, hardened sinner that I am? It was the discovery that God loves
56 me. It softened me. That was both the hardest thing for me to believe and the most powerful
57 wonderful thing to believe. I often think of it like this: When I decided RoseMarie was the lady
58 for me and I asked her to marry me, to my surprise, she wasn't immediately enthusiastic about
59 the whole idea. She said that she would have to think about it. It didn't seem to me that it
60 required any thought. I had thought about it. So here I was in my merry self-centered way; and I
61 took her flowers, took her for walks, quoted poetry to her, I was out in front of her window early
62 in the morning before she went off to the university. Finally I looked her in the eye and said,
63 "Rose Marie, I love you." That did it. I think she was a little embarrassed. We get embarrassed
64 when God looks us in the eye and says, "I love you." That is what melts us. he said, "Yes, I
65 will." That is what moves other people when we conduct a love offensive -- that's the glory.

66 **1. Winning the Person, Not the Point**

67 How would that work? I would like to give an example from the end of *Come Back,*
68 *Barbara.* Our daughter, Barbara, had tried my patience for eight years and often revealed how
69 little of it I had. The grace of God was that I learned a lot about myself in that conflict. It
70 probably did more for me than almost anyone else. The question came, "How do you mount a
71 love offensive to bring this person into the kingdom?" Relationship now was open; we were
72 good friends. God had worked many things. She just wasn't a Christian. At this point, the
73 elders in the church took up an offering for her and Angelo--they weren't even married. She had
74 a fellowship to go to Stanford, but they didn't have enough money to go across the country. So,
75 the elders took up an offering to pay their traveling expenses. When the money was given to

76 them with a nice note, Angelo was so touched that he got up and went outside. (Angelo is one
77 very tough guy.) I think his conscience was reached deeply by that love. He told me later that he
78 had to go outside on the porch because he didn't want everybody to see there were tears in his
79 eyes. That was encouraging. I asked, "Lord, what do you want me to do next? That certainly
80 glorified you." Taking up offerings to help a couple living together is not naturally what
81 Presbyterian elders do. I was as amazed as he was, to tell you the truth. The glory of that was
82 very evident to Angelo. He came back in and said, "I have never seen a church like this one."

83 A couple days later, just before they got ready to leave, I came in the living room.
84 Barbara was there, and Keren was lying on the couch. Rose Marie was either standing or sitting
85 there also. I prayed and went in. We started talking about their trip, and I asked, "Barbara, have
86 you ever thought much about eternity?" I said, "When I go to heaven, I really want to take you
87 along. Not just as a beautiful memory, but I want to take you along." When she heard that, she
88 exploded. In our family, as she puts it, there are not many shouters. In fact, she is the only one
89 who yells. She yelled, but gradually came down. I just sat there and didn't say anything -- one of
90 those rare moments when I kept my mouth shut. When she calmed down, would you believe, I
91 repeated it. I said, "Barbara, I don't know why you got so upset. All I said was, 'When I go to
92 heaven, I didn't want to take you along only as a beautiful memory.'" Of course, she was mad
93 again. I wasn't trying to manipulate her; I was just telling her how I felt. She is really mad and
94 said, "You have always been doing this to me. You have always been fighting with me ever
95 since I was a small child." I let her go on for a while and finally said, "No Barbara, that is not
96 true. I can only remember two or three fights we have had. It was not nearly enough. We should
97 have had many." She looked at me and suddenly ran across the room. She burst into tears, fell at
98 my feet and put her head in my lap. After she was through sobbing, she looked up with a grin,
99 and said, "Dad, we are going to have to do this more often." I knew it was over, but I said,
100 "Barbara, I have one thing I would like to ask you. You know, all of this proves that I can't
101 change you and you can't change yourself. But Jesus can. Would you just pray that He would?"
102 She thought about it seriously and said that she would.

103 In six months she was a Christian, and shortly thereafter, Angelo was too. At the
104 beginning of those eight years of conflict, I could no more have done that than I could have
105 started flying across the room. I don't think any of you expect me to fly across the room. It is
106 impossible. The glory of God was this difference. It came about by the Holy Spirit changing the
107 way I thought about her. It wasn't just a mental manipulation I was going through. I had really
108 experienced the glory of Christ. I don't know whether that appeals to you or not. We all like
109 success stories, and if you read the rest of the book you will see how many success stories there
110 weren't. I lost all the battles, except, in the end, the Lord won the war. That is really what we
111 want. Too often we are interested in the battles when the Lord is interested in winning wars.

112 That defines a love offensive. It is where you are much more interested in winning the person
113 than winning the argument or establishing how right you are for the benefit of your own ego.

114 **2. Dealing Openly With Differences Without Judging Attitudes**

115 Constructive conflict, then, is a love offensive in which you engage in spiritual warfare,
116 and the measure of God's glory in the whole process is the difference He makes by grace. I think
117 it comes down to learning how to deal with differences without judging attitudes. One of the
118 things that happened to me, about twenty years ago as the New Life Church was being founded,
119 was that I tended to get tense about a particular person who was a leader in the church who really
120 was not doing what he should. He wasn't doing anything in particular -- that was my problem. I
121 couldn't see what he was doing. So I had this little prayer meeting. It was just by myself; I
122 didn't invite the Lord. I didn't need Him -- I was just there to tell him how I saw things. I was
123 telling him, "Lord, this man is an arid, dry, cold-hearted intellectual." I drew a very hard picture
124 of him. Finally the Lord visited this prayer meeting, and the more I talked to the Lord about this
125 man, I realized I had drawn a self-portrait. I had been terribly judging him and I was
126 condemned. If you look at James 4:11-12, that is exactly what he is talking about. **"Brothers,**
127 **do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks**
128 **against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in**
129 **judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and**
130 **destroy. But you -- who are you to judge your neighbor?"** James 4:11-12 You say you are a doer
131 of the law; actually you are a judge of the law and you never were called to be that when you start
132 watching for it as the judge and the accuser of the brethren. God really humbled me, and that
133 man can be very thankful that God came to the prayer meeting finally before I got to see him.

134 **3. Dealing With Issues, Not Personalities**

135 Then the next thing is to try to deal with issues, not personalities. The natural way to try
136 to solve a problem is to be frank with a person rather than saying, "What is the issue? What is
137 the difficulty?" Even if you want to change a strategy in the church of God, we often begin with
138 judging people and thinking ahead of time they will be against something. Many times some
139 people will be almost automatically against things. I think that as you look at it more closely,
140 there are ways of doing things that are not so confrontational, in a bad sense. For instance, when
141 the church I had before New Life began to experience some measure of revival, the question was,
142 "How do you change the service to reflect it?" I had a friend in California who simply changed
143 the name of the pastoral prayer. I think he changed it from "pastoral prayer" to "congregational
144 prayer," and he had a fight on his hands. You have those hawks out there ready to descend. You
145 remember Prometheus and the hawk chewing on his liver. Me being Prometheus and a lot of

146 people being the hawk or really the eagle-eating at my liver. So I decided there is a certain
147 amount of wisdom in not changing anything in the service because people might not be able to
148 handle that right away. I talked with the elders and said that I would like to have testimonies on
149 occasion from the new converts in the church. They won't be long, but we will have testimonies
150 if you are agreeable to that. They couldn't and didn't argue with that. From time to time, we
151 began to have these testimonies, and I became better at spiritual inquiring. Some of the
152 testimonies were really powerful.

153 There was this woman in the church that I taught for six months before I would let her
154 join the church because I didn't think she understood the gospel clearly. I brainwashed her so
155 she could repeat it. Finally she became sick with vertigo. She couldn't even walk to the
156 bathroom because it was so serious. I would visit her once a week, and one day she said to me,
157 "Pastor, did you notice that you come here once a week and pray with me but I never get any
158 better." I said, "You know, Emma, that is true." I admit I had a slight touch of cockiness now
159 and then. No one else noticed it, but it was there. So walking out the door, I looked at her and
160 with a big laugh I said, "Emma, you don't pray loud enough." I came back the next week,
161 forgetting all about that ridiculous comment, and she is full of praise. I asked her what was going
162 on. She told me that she was getting better and was able to walk to the bathroom. I said, "Okay,
163 that's great. I am praising the Lord too, but what is going on here?" She said, "I am so glad that
164 when I pray now, Jim and my daughter live at the other end of the house and cannot hear me
165 pray. Last week when you were here, you walked out the door with that hearty laugh, and said I
166 didn't pray loud enough. I decided you were right. I have been shouting, and every time I pray I
167 get an answer." She was radiant. It was hard to keep her on the bed. I suspect that she finally
168 got converted with a good loud yell from the depths of her heart to the Lord. Whosoever shall
169 call in the name of the Lord will be saved. She was just a different person. I wanted her to come
170 to church and give her testimony. Since she was a young lady of about seventy-five, I thought it
171 would be less threatening to the older people in the church. She stood up in her pew and began
172 to talk about what Jesus had done for her. She was crying, smiling, and laughing all at once. She
173 said to the people, "Don't feel sorry for me, please. I am only crying because I am so happy. I
174 just want you to have the same kind of happiness. What do you think about Jesus?" There is the
175 glory!

176 We brought the glory into the service, and that began to change the whole attitude of the
177 congregation toward worship. They became much more aware of the deeds of God and the glory.
178 What was happening was that the whole worship was being shifted by hooking into what God
179 was doing. The only other change I made was beginning to encourage the elders themselves to
180 take part, at least briefly, in the pastoral prayer -- so we would share it a bit. As more and more
181 men began to respond to the gospel, we had a dozen or so men meeting with the elders before

182 church to pray. It got up to eighteen or twenty eventually. I began to encourage these men to
183 join the elders in prayer. It only added three or four minutes to the service. These were the men
184 who began to wake up the congregation. Everybody expected the elders to know how to pray
185 and they expected me to know how to pray. We did know how to pray, but for that reason,
186 paradoxically, we didn't know how to pray. We knew so much about it. These men, with great
187 fear and trembling, couldn't even pray out loud. When I first began to disciple them, they
188 couldn't pray. Then they began to pray out loud with me and I brought them to this prayer
189 meeting before the church service. When they then prayed in church, people were really aware
190 that God was there. That is all I did. I kept the whole situation: We still had the Apostle's
191 Creed and the Lord's Prayer, but people began to wake up and stop reading their bulletins when
192 things were going on. The Holy Spirit was there. It is a love offensive -- where you try to get
193 people to see what Christ is doing. You don't deal with personalities. If I had pressed at that
194 point for a big change in the church service, we would have had a big fight and personality clash.

195 **4. Asking Questions, Not Accusing**

196 We should be asking questions rather than accusing. What is constructive conflict? In
197 that same congregation, there had been a big fight over the women's issue. I never did get fully
198 clear in my mind what it was over. It had been so horrendous that a number of people had left
199 the congregation. It was very small anyway, and they didn't need people leaving. Maybe that
200 was God's grace anyway. People had become thoroughly angry and they shouted and screamed
201 at each other over the women's issue. It had happened before I came, and if I had known about it
202 I might not have come to that church. I finally went to the women and asked them what the
203 conflict was over. They had been accused of being divisive, but they told me it was over
204 efficiency. They told me that the men in the church were inefficient. I asked her what she meant
205 by that and she said, "They will talk anything to death. They don't seem to know how to get
206 started. They don't know how to carry a job through to the conclusion." I told her I had a few
207 problems in that area myself. I said to them, "Why don't you work for me? You don't have to
208 be anything official in the church since you said you have given up that idea. Why don't you just
209 help me?" Their eyes glowed. They said, "We have some ideas right off. We have heard that
210 you want to start evangelizing through the village. Why don't you let us save you a load of time?
211 We will go through the village and we will interview everyone to find out if they would like a
212 visit from you. When we have done that work, we will show you which families want a call
213 from you." They saved me a ton of time, and did a great job. In a very short time we had
214 families coming to the church as a result of this work. It was amazing. If I had gone to them and
215 said, "Look ladies, I have heard your reputation is a bit *ugh!*" As I listened to them, they had an
216 excellent case. In any church, the ministries that you want to interfere with least are women's

217 ministries because they are better run than ministries conducted by men. That may not always be
218 the case. I have seen some that were badly run too. Nonetheless, men often have fallen into sins
219 of incompetence. These ladies were very competent. We do need the whole body, we don't need
220 just the male part of it.

221 One of the ways that we show leadership is listening to others. So I asked them
222 questions, and they were a tremendous help. Then they got carried away and thought that I
223 would listen to them on any topic. They started getting into my own ministry, asking questions
224 about it. I think in some ways, the fact that I eventually listened to them led to much deeper
225 revival in the church -- at least it did in my life. One of the ladies was quite heavy, and she used
226 to sit in either the first or second row in the prayer meeting. Afterwards, she would always say,
227 "Why can't we have more of a prayer meeting and less of a Bible study." I asked if she didn't
228 like my Bible study. She said that she loved the Bible study, and that made my heart
229 appreciative. Here I was being loved and encouraged a bit, but they still said, "Couldn't we have
230 it on another night, and make this a prayer meeting." I still felt a little bit of, "Don't they know I
231 have gone to Westminster Seminary." Then the thought occurred to me that maybe they do
232 know and that is why they are praying for me. That is the other thing they used to do. I had been
233 in other churches and the congregation never prayed for their pastor that fervently. These ladies
234 started praying fervently for me. Eventually I changed a lot in my own life through their
235 influence, but if you start threatening and accusing and not just ask them why they think this way,
236 God can't bless it.

237 **5. Refusing to Gossip**

238 The other thing in the manner of constructive conflict: There needs to be a rejection of
239 gossip and the courage to go directly to people when you have something against them. That
240 means we have to make ourselves approachable. If I hadn't at least in some way lead these
241 women to think they could talk to me, I don't think they would have approached me. So we
242 really want to work on approachability. I haven't worked enough on that. My guess is that if you
243 want to get in really good warfare, you have to be more approachable. I would say that for
244 myself. Positively, if you reject that gossip, what do you do? What you want to do is learn to
245 communicate openly with other people. That is what sonship is all about -- we are open. The
246 whole point is that there is nothing veiled between God and us. We all with unveiled face behold
247 as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. We are being changed. That is what sanctification is --
248 looking in the gospel mirror and being changed into the image of Christ. We become those who,
249 more and more, exchange our lives because He exchanged His life for us. If that is true, we see
250 then positively. Then it means that we have to become serious about not repeating negative
251 conversations. I don't know about you, but after I have heard enough problems from other

252 Christians, I tend to get downcast. You are just into major problems. That is a tremendous
253 struggle for me sometimes. I sometimes see nothing but problems, and I get kind of a sour
254 mental state. We must see this as devilish. The self-pity that goes with it, and so be careful then
255 to not run in your church a Christian soap opera. What does a soap opera consist of? Repeating
256 conversations from other people. You have to learn to fight against that.

257 **III. WHAT CAUSES DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT?**

258 **A. Christian Cannibalism**

259 What are the causes of destructive conflict? Well, we have already talked a lot about the
260 tongue in this series, and the tongue is the biting edge of destruction -- biting and devouring.
261 Christian cannibalism. We need to ask ourselves if there is anything that goes deeper. I think it
262 is this: When people get converted and they come together in fellowship, they have a new love
263 for one another and a new joy. There is also a new irritability. Did you ever notice that in the
264 church? After a while there develops a kind of irritability, and a lot of what Charlie and Ruth
265 Jones [the drama team at the conference] have been celebrating with us is Christian irritability.
266 Isn't that true? Sanctified, devoted Christian irritability. You know the skit in which the little
267 boy gets his hands glued together with super glue, and the father and the mother blame each other
268 as they ride all the way to church. This is it. Whatever the Holy Spirit must do in ministry, He
269 must visit us to overcome that. People are always talking about their baptisms of the Holy Spirit,
270 and I think we all could use lots of baptisms of the Holy Spirit. We could use a baptism of clear
271 seeing so that we no longer see people as our enemies but we bless them. We also need baptisms
272 of joy and of love. We ought to have them every morning, noon and night. That is why we pray.
273 So we must pray specifically against our irritability, which when we look at it goes into self-
274 righteousness and the feeling that we are superior to others. The difficulty with getting rid of that
275 is summarized very well by a former missionary in World Harvest. A very gifted missionary. He
276 had this to say about feeling superior to others: "It is really hard not to feel superior to others
277 when you are superior to others." Most of us have that feeling. Isn't that the heart of it? We
278 may not be superior to anyone. We may be much their inferior, but I think this is the root of the
279 irritability.

280 **B. Being "Right"**

281 Jeff Salasin, at a conference, was summarizing what I teach. He said, "You can
282 summarize what Jack said in three letters: "PUS" He is talking about pus." I am glad I am from
283 Oregon; we don't talk that way there. I thought about it and he is right. "PUS" stands for Pride,
284 Unbelief and Self-righteousness. I would add an "L" to make it a little more dignified. "L"

285 standing for lust. These things are behind the irritability. As we look at the tongue assignment,
286 we ought to see the tongue as a revealer. It reveals what is going on inside. Of course once we
287 hit that, it is especially dangerous when there are times of testing and you didn't ask for wisdom.
288 How shall we explain that? Each of us has a point where things really matter to us. Perhaps they
289 matter to God too, at the point where they matter to us. At this point where things really matter
290 and we are most likely to be right, we are at the danger point. I don't know if you understand this
291 or not. Do you understand? If you are caught in a sin, you are more likely to repent immediately
292 than if in what you are doing you are convinced it is one of your virtues. Beware of me when I
293 am right; beware of you when you are right.

294 You see, when we talk about the law, we must be so careful. Sometimes we really are
295 right, but even when we really are right we can be very dangerous because Jesus said of the
296 Pharisees, **"So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what
297 they do, for they do not practice what they preach."** ^{Matthew 23:3} Read Luke and Matthew 23.
298 Jesus looks over Jerusalem and says, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and
299 stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen
300 gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."** ^{Matthew 23:37} This comes after
301 all the woes on Jerusalem. They are basically woes on people who think they are keeping the law
302 and are not. Be careful about being right -- watch out! If you ask for wisdom in those times of
303 testing, what might you discover?

304 The point where I know that I am really vulnerable is in the area of my plans to do
305 evangelism. This is very important to me, and if you pull a linchpin out of it you might find
306 yourself extremely unpopular with me for a while. I probably wouldn't say anything angry to
307 you, but I would more likely freeze you out. Anybody like this? This one time I was flying to
308 California with my wife, Rose Marie, and I was going to speak in California and then go to
309 Mexico. I was so depressed, and it kept getting worse. When I got on the plane, there was a
310 fellow faculty member from Westminster on the plane. He was so filled with joy, it was
311 disgusting. As I saw his joy, the Lord convicted me of my deep sin that I had simply missed
312 something valuable. What was it? That the joy of the Lord is tied into letting Him be sovereign
313 over your plans. A friend had taken out the key evangelist for a program I had. When he took
314 out that key evangelist, the program fell apart. I went to him and told him, "You promised that I
315 could have that man, and you took him." He said, "Well, you are right. I did promise and I am
316 sorry, but I have already committed him to someone else." I went away saying I forgave him, but
317 I really didn't. I just didn't have the wisdom to know myself, and I didn't ask God for wisdom. I
318 was in danger of destroying myself, but what God did at that time was bring me to repentance. It
319 was so powerful that by the time I got to California I was so filled with joy.

320 **C. Unexamined Character Flaws**

321 Also, unexamined character flaws. In James, a lot is said about selfish ambition and
322 envy. If you look at the works of the flesh in Galatians you will be surprised how many of them
323 are divisive works instead of the fighting spirit -- not taking the log out of your own eye before
324 you take the speck out of someone else's eye. **"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious:
325 sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord,
326 jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies,
327 and the like. I warn you as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the
328 kingdom of God."** Galatians 5:19-21 There is also the deception of pride, unbelief, and self-
329 righteousness. We have already talked about that and I won't go into it again, but what I want to
330 say is one way to discover whether you have a lot of pride and self-righteousness is to look at
331 your convictions. Now having strong convictions is great. You have got to have strong
332 convictions, but you also must accept the fact that intertwined with those strong convictions are
333 sinful attitudes. Just because you have strong convictions, which in many ways are right, doesn't
334 mean that right in the center of those convictions may be envy, pride, and unbelief. Those
335 convictions themselves may need a severe honesty in looking at them. This is something I am
336 reluctant to do.

337 I have seen more people sin in fights over the law than almost any other thing. They just
338 broke the law in fighting over the law. We who are righteous must be so careful when we go to
339 win the unrighteous. In one church I served, an elder committed adultery with another elder's
340 wife. They ran off together, and had been committing adultery for over a year and a half
341 together. I think it could have destroyed the church. Not that the people would have imitated
342 what they did because everyone was so shocked. Immediately you get some people who want
343 judgment, and others who are probably too tolerant. What you need to do, what God gave us
344 grace to do with elders, is stand up in front of the people and first ask them to pray the first
345 week. We didn't even tell them who it was, I don't think. The second week, we came and
346 announced that they were under discipline -- we didn't excommunicate them. What we did was
347 simply say that first week that we come to repent of our own sins first, and then we dealt with
348 them. I simply made it almost my full-time job to deal with them until it was resolved. God
349 used this to bring great unity and blessing to the church. It could have been very destructive, but
350 we had to look at our own convictions and the feeling that we had because some people would
351 have instinctively wanted to enact severe judgment and others less severe. This could have
352 caused people to start fighting with each other. So watch out when you have absolute
353 convictions that you are right.

354 **IV. WHO IS QUALIFIED FOR CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT?**

355 Well, who is qualified to engage in constructive conflict? Basically, we are saying that
356 this has to be a wise person. How do you get wisdom? James 1 says that there is only one way
357 to get it -- ask. **"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all
358 without finding fault, and it will be given to him."** James 1:5 I guess there is something even
359 more basic: Why don't we ask more for wisdom? How much time do you spend praying for
360 wisdom? I don't spend that much time. I usually get my back up against the wall and I say,
361 "Lord, give me some wisdom." Isn't that the way we do it? So there is not a pro-active fighting,
362 but rather playing catch up. At the beginning of every enterprise and every process we are going
363 through, we should be constantly praying for wisdom on high. Out of that would come the
364 peaceful person described in James. **"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of
365 righteousness."** James 3:18 How do you engage in this? One way you engage in it is one of the
366 things I have already said: by information and by repentance. The other thing is often that
367 people, when there is bad conflict in a church or in a marriage, are ignorant of each other.
368 Repentance brings this to the light. Often times we don't interpret ourselves enough to others
369 and people are left mystified as to why we are doing what we are doing. Often times marriages
370 only get resolved when the husband and wife sit down together and say, "What would you like
371 me to do or stop doing? What would you want from me?" I have seen many marriages make
372 great progress by this simple action. In Oregon we have the statement: Never complain, never
373 explain. It is the state philosophy. Traditionally in Oregon we never complain and never
374 explain. Heads bloodied but unbound; we may not know where we are going but we are going
375 there.

376 **V. AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE**

377 It seems to me that one of the best examples is just to go back to Jesus and his way of
378 engaging in conflict. You will notice that sometimes Jesus seems to be going out of his way to
379 get in conflict. Did you ever notice how much that Jesus seems to be controversial? If you read
380 Ken Bailey¹ on the parables, you will obviously come away with that these parables are far more
381 controversial than we would read them. There is a culture shock there that is often like an arrow
382 going into people's hearts. This brings us to the depth of Jesus' seriousness. We have already

¹Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976.

183 said so much for love. Jesus is also making a holy love, and did you notice how much. As an
384 example, He talks to people about hell -- He talks about heaven too. As you look at Jesus
385 engaging in conflict again and again, he brings the conflict around to eternity. The parables he
386 tells do not encourage lust, lawlessness, or greed. I would say, applying this to us as Christians
387 today, one of the primary lusts that very few people speak to is love of money and material greed.
388 I think the church needs to be in conflict in these areas. Just giving some of Jesus' teaching
389 about what is going to happen to you if you go into eternity and your heart is set on material
390 goods, will show that in our holiness no one will see the Lord. Jesus says it is better to pluck the
391 eye out of you head and cut off your arm or hand than to go into hell. I think there has to be that
392 divine seriousness in conflict.

393 Back to Barbara, I think I really meant it when I said, "Barbara, I don't want you to go to
394 hell." I put it positively, but she got the other side of it. When I was on vacation, I was
395 meditating on Matthew 23, 24, and 25, relating to hell and woes. Sam, who is 18 months,
396 walked on my Bible, and neatly ruined all those pages. You can look at it and hardly read them,
397 but after some repair, I guess they are okay. I was tempted to say, "Well, I don't need them in the
398 Bible anyway." I really know what is in them and I can go to Mark or Luke and get the same
399 stuff. You are not going to be able to follow Jesus if you don't get some of that power which
400 comes from facing eternity yourself and by bringing others to see this is the fight for life and
401 death. Then you engage in spiritual inquiry both with the non-Christian, the lost, and those who
402 at least think they are saved. My guess is there are a lot of people in the church who are
403 convinced that they are going to heaven, and they need somebody who loves them enough to get
404 into conflict with them about it -- not to judge them but to inquire. You should ask, "How is it
405 with your soul?"



2. Memorize Galatians 6:1-2

"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. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."