Romans 12:18, James 4:1: I’d like a Junior Bacon Cheeseburger

with a side of Conflict, please

Somewhere around 2003 or 2004, Tori and I were driving up interstate 81 in Virginia making our way home from college for a visit home. We weren’t married to each other yet but we were pretty serious. Just like any road trip there we needed to stop to get some food so we decided to stop at a great local place by the name of Wendys. My go-to at Wendy’s or any fast-food is usually a chicken sandwich so I’m pretty sure that’s what I ordered. Tori’s choice was a little more complicated. At the time, some health concerns required her to eat gluten free items. Now mind you, this was nearly 2 decades ago. It was not cool like it is now. So there was no way there any GF options on any restaurant menu much less Wendy’s.

So I order what I wanted, most likely that chicken sandwich and Tori proceeds to tell me, the person sitting in the driver’s seat, the special request I’m to make to the person on the other end of the wireless communication device. By the way, I’ve always struggled with this. I hardly ever “specialize” any order in a drive-through. Drive-thru ordering puts me in a fight or flight situation. I’m pathetic, you’re right.

And if you’ve ridden with me and I’m driving you might have noticed that I just tell you…”go ahead and tell em what you want.” I know those microphones are pretty sensitive. They’ll be able to hear you but truly I just Can’t handle that kind of performative stress. Listen in those situations the driver has not only assumed the very important role of stewarding a 2 ton vehicle safely down the road and then I’m supposed to hear all the things you want and then correctly repeat that to the listening ear on the other side. Nope. Can do it.

So Tori says on that fateful day, “ I want a Junior bacon cheeseburger, with no bun.” I think to myself, “What? No bun?” I’m pretty sure that’s the weirdest thing I’ve heard and that will most certainly be the weirdest thing the attendant will have heard. You might as well tell them that we want a big serving of spit on our burger.

So who wins? My beloved girlfriend’s desire to have something she can eat that won’t completely mess with her body or my fear that the listening and judgmental Wendy’s attendant would deem me the worst interstate traveler of the century because I ordered a burger with no bun. Well, of course, I chose my love for my future bride. Nope, wrong. I didn’t. My unbased fear won the day. I ordered her a regular junior bacon cheeseburger and told her I’ll just pull the bun off myself. and when I attempted to do just that minutes later, my fingerprints were nearly seared off by molten hot cheese. A Payback of sorts. To this day I don’t think I’ve ever seen cheese that hot

Well as you might have guessed, Tori was pretty upset and rightly so. I think this might have been one of our first major “conflicts” of our relationship. It took us several hours to come to a resolution and even then it probably was a half-hearted resolution on my part.

We now look back at that fateful day and get a pretty good laugh. We shake our heads at how selfish I was that day. My deep desire to be liked and respected by a restaurant employee won the moment. I wanted that employee to respect me as opposed to the beautiful woman sitting next to me. All those desires of saving face, wanting to be liked and respected, admired would drive me to break her heart while trying to save face with a stranger.

My fear of being classified as a weirdo and my desire to be respected by the restaurant employee collided with Tori’s expectation that I would care for her and my love for her would lead me to provide for her physical needs.

Title slide

But really is that unlike any of the conflicts you and I have on a regular basis?

Now I narrowed our thinking for minute when I gave you an example of our relational conflict in a romantic relationship but conflict is an equal opportunity occasion.

When An expectation, a fear, a want, a desire that we have collides with someone else’s expectations, fears, wants, desires. In that moment there is the potential for conflict.

It could be views of parenting, the types of songs we sing, the call to practice financial generosity, views on how to buy a car, which covid vaccine to take or whether to take one at all, which political candidate to vote for, which movie to see, how community group should function, how to read the Bible, serving and giving away your time, how to approach racism, how we should be taxed, which new band has the best sound, whether to wear a mask or not, which Netflix show is the best, How much of a snoozefest the newest Mandelorian season was, what kind of school is best for kids, organic or non-organic, new or used car, Android or iPhone (and if you haven’t used a high-end Android phone please don’t try to enter the debate), how much to save, how to budget…I could keep going but I’m sure right now you might have an example or two of something that has wounded a relationship of yours.

This happens all the time. Our expectations, our fears, our wants, our desires collide together with someone else’s… specifically someone else here in our church family. Listen this This can be so disorienting, especially if we address the conflict. But often we either pretend to forgive or we just let it stew it months or years before we finally end up leaving the church. If we don’t communicate our hurts they can eat at us creating a gulf between us and our friends or our leaders or if we communicate them the wrong way we can come away with broken relationships.

So this morning we’re going to be taking a look at conflict. This is a vast topic and for that reason Whitney this week will be offering some additional content on the podcast so I highly recommend you give that a listen.

This morning we’re going to look at a few key verses within God’s Word. If you don’t have a Bible….

First let’s look at two very brief passages of scripture. That’s Romans 12 and James 4

Romans 12:16-18

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. -- Romans 12:16-18 (CSB)

James 4: 1

What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you? -- James 4:1 (CSB)

That’s the word of the Lord from Romans and James.

I don’t think I need to convince you this morning that conflict exists. You’ve been there. You’ve felt it and you’ve seen it happen. My concern is that we don’t know how to resolve it. So we tend to either pretend like everything is ok or we go in with guns ablazing and make matters much worse.

Now I don’t think every conflict is inherently sinful but every conflict has the ingredients for it. You see…

Conflicts are typically made up of 3 things: a person, desires, and unmet expectations. You want a large Mocha latte and your preferred café tells you that they’re all out of the mocha latte mix. You have all 3 ingredients…now what’s the difference between you starting to rant and rave, flip over tables becoming the wrong kind of social media sensation and between you saying, “oh ok, I’ll have a vanilla late”? Now this is a really simplistic example but one that’s not necessarily below us.

James 4:1 says the difference between the two situations is our passions. Now that word in some of your translations might say “desires”. I think it’s better understood as over-desires. So why do we have conflict? James says we have conflict because our desires have been given too much weight. But what does that mean? Is this the churchy answer of well anytime you can’t get what you want you gotta make sure it’s not becoming an idol.

So why did I flip out on not being able to have a mocha latte? No it wasn’t bc I had made mocha lattes my idol. I mean it could be but probably not. That’s ridiculous. Why do I facebook rant when I hear someone give an opposing view of the Covid vaccine. It’s probably not bc the COVID vaccine itself is an idol or over-desire. The reason is probably deeper. Why does my emotional temperature rise when I hear my kids bickering in the morning before school? I need to ask the Why. The why will help us uncover what’s really going on within us.

You see what we typically do is we shift the blame from ourselves onto what someone else did or some other circumstance. If that thing had not happened or if that person had not done that then I would not have flipped out or we wouldn’t be having this problem. We blame-shift rather than asking WHY. Honestly it’s just easier to see the faults in others rather than take a hard look at yourself and ask “Why am I bothered by what she said and what do I need to do to change.”

Asking the Why uncovers how we have made good goods into a god. You see those desires we have aren’t always bad things. All things we would consider bad all have good beginnings. Sex is a beautiful and incredibly unifying gift of intimacy shared between a husband and wife. Used outside the context of marriage, yeah it might be fun for a bit but it leads to brokenness and often more loneliness. I see it all the time. Or misused in a marriage like when one person in the marriage begins to place too much weight on needing it to function then this too is a recipe for conflict.

Medicines like painkillers are good things but when misused and overused ruin lives. Respect when given and received is a natural outflow of authority but when respect is demanded can lead to a struggle for power. And Power itself when used in humility leads to flourishing bc it’s used to serve and preserve but when it’s misused can lead to injustice.

Wanting to be known is a good thing, but when that desire becomes an over-desire, the thing that you think about often and blame others for not doing, it’s likely that no one will ever fill that ever-largening, gaping hole and that will be the characteristic that defines all your relationships: no one pursues me.

Are you understanding what James is trying through the inspiration of the holy Spirit is trying to get us to see here? The source of your conflict is not bc someone else did something to you. It’s because your good desires have been warped.

Now let me take a Timeout for a second and speak to a segment of people where this is not always the case. There are instances in which power and control play a despicable part in one-sided conflicts. In these cases the person might use overtly unkind words or in a manipulative fashion might use words or actions to get someone else to do whatever they want them to do. They’re likely to regularly tell you you’re missing the mark and just not making them happy or you’re such a disappointment.

These kind of conflicts fit into a different category altogether and if you think this is you we would love to talk with you about this. This kind of conflict can leave you feeling like you’re crazy or that you can never make this particular person happy and I would say it would typically leave you saddened and leaves you feeling like a failure more than feeling angry. Again, if this is you we would love to talk with you about this. If that’s you, you’re most likely looking inward all the time. You’re asking the WHY but you can’t see it. Listen This is not what James is talking about and this is not the kind of conflict I’m addressing this morning.

But listen, for the rest of us, James is telling us, if you’re in a conflict; If you feel like someone has slighted you. You’ve got to ask why. You’ve got to look inward before you go into Airing of grievances mode. The airing of grievance is why we’re here in the first place. That leads to fights and conflicts. God’s word is saying you’ve got to stop, meditate, and listen.

Why do I feel slighted? Do I have some unmet expectation that I felt that person should have accomplished but they didn’t. It’s not just bc your kid’s keep disobeying that you get angry and yell at them. It’s not bc other people don’t know how to drive that sets you off into a frenzy. It’s not bc other people don’t know how to keep a clean microwave in the breakroom that leads you to unleash a rant every time you open that microwave door. Your and my initial reactions to what we feel are other people’s wrong ways of doing things are not the real issue. The real issue lies deeper down. It’s a warped desire that brings about the lack of peace in your relationships.

You see, the behaviors that put us at odds with others whether that’s your spouse, your roommate, or fellow church members are at their core peace-seeking desires that produce pseudo-peace behaviors. Those good desires; those Good gifts that God gives us are intended for cultivation and flourishing. They’re intended for our good, for our peace. (Gen 1:28; both Gen. passages in same slide), God created the world and all the things in it and he told man and woman to go out and be fruitful and multiply, fill it and subdue it. When God created, everything was deemed what? Yeah it was Good. It wasn’t just ok. Everything was working perfectly together. Then he tells adam and eve. Take the peace and the full integration and cooperation of all things that you see working together here in the garden and take it out into all the world exercising dominion over all creation and bring peace to it. See that all the world is fully integrated and that all things are working well. See that all things are at peace.

But what happens? The Serpent comes along (Gen 3:6) and twists what God says and Eve’s like… “well I guess it’s ok to eat this thing. God said it wasn’t but this here snake says it is,…so”. And look how she describes the fruit “it’s delightful to look at” and “desirable to attain wisdom”.

In their own right both of these things are good things. Beauty and wisdom. Who doesn’t want either or admire either? Beauty can be one of the most peaceful things on the earth. Ever seen the grand canyon in person or?

And wisdom? Did you ever taste my granny’s cooking? That’s true information applied in real life. It was incredible. Wisdom and the pursuit of it is why we have so many podcasts. We admire and long to understand how to live well and apply knowledge to specific areas of life.

But Eve takes and eats and hands some to Adam and he does the same. Now I can’t help but to imagine that James is riffin off this passage when he says that “it’s your desires that lead you into conflict.” It’s your desire for good things; it’s your desire for peace that leads to wars. That word used for “delight” when it says the fruit was a delight to the eyes comes from a Hebrew word meaning desire. The fruit was a desire to the eye. And then Eve’s desire for wisdom. Both of these desires mixed in with the serpents twisting of God’s words and we have a disaster on our hands. Sin and rebellion enter into in the world. Eve, in her journey to take peace for herself brings war between God and man.

We have that longing of peace implanted deep within us. That’s why I say those desires you have deep within you are not inherently bad. We have a desire deep down within us for peace and integration. We want all things to work well. You were created that way. You were created to be at peace with God and with others.

But the real problem that you and I experience often is that we go about getting peace the wrong way. Peace becomes a selfish game wherein we try to gain peace at the expense of war. We end up warring against God and the way he intended us to live and we war against his image bearers bc they are the one’s who are keeping me from my peace. Searching for warped internal peace almost always leads us to conflict with others.

So conflict exists because we seek peace the wrong way but how do we resolve it?

Conflict is resolved not simply by seeking peace but also by making it.

Now I don’t think it’s any surprise to anyone that we weren’t created for or intended to be at odds with others. The problem lies in how we try to go about finding resolution. Finding resolution, resolving conflict, or making peace sometimes requires a lot of effort. And I think that’s one of the reasons why we tend to not make peace with others. I have to call the person and then we have to set up a time to talk and then travel to wherever and make small talk before I deal the right hook of confrontation. Well maybe that’s just me. You’re probably more mature.

Think of Peace making efforts along this scale (scale drawingby Ken Sande). On the left you have Peace-faking. This is where you either pretend it doesn’t exist bc you don’t want to have a conversation that you’ve deemed too hard or awkward and so you jut avoid it. You run away but it’s still on your heart and mind, weighing heavy on you. The other person’s actions still bother you and eat at you.

On the far right side you have Peace-breaking efforts. This is where words or perhaps even fists get involved. This is the territory of slander where you just have to get something off your chest to your friends or you gossip about a situation but you’re not committed to resolving it with the individual. You draw more people into the fray creating an even bigger mess.

In the middle are actual peace-making efforts. If you’re a follower of Jesus this is where we live. This is our path.

Let’s look at what Romans 12:18 (with the scale drawing; perhaps have the scripture passage as an overlay with the picture predominantly on the screen) says.

If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. -- Romans 12:18 (CSB)

First the expectation is clear. It is my and your responsibility to live at peace. I am responsible for making peace. If I’ve upset someone, then it’s my responsibility to go to that person and make peace ( matt 5:22-24). IN teaching to the people Jesus says” oh you’re concerned about murder. Well I tell you if you’ve ever had anger towards someone then you’re subject to the same judgment as murder. But listen to the level of responsibility for our sin towards others that Jesus draws out. IF I do something that leads someone to being angry with me, I am not only partially responsible for that person’s anger towards me but I’m also responsible for their eternal judgment. City Church that’s steep. Now before you say, “that’s not nice of Jesus. He’s creating codependent behavior.” He’s trying to make me responsible for other people’s feelings.

First, be careful in Judging God. 2nd, Jesus is trying to get us to see that our conflicts are more than temporal awkward inconveniences. They have eternal consequences. So if you’ve bothered someone, if you’ve done or said something whether or not you think it’s silly or whether or not you think you’re at fault. Go resolve the situation and make amends.”

Now let’s flip it around too. (Matt 18:15) Jesus too says if someone has sinned against you you don’t wait for that person to come to you, you go to that person and try to make peace. It’s a two way street. Someone hurts or harms you, you don’t wait for that person to make the move.. You make the first move.

If you’re a follower of Jesus there’s no possible option to avoid making peace.

Back to Romans 12 slide

Now some of you might have caught the option to “overlook” in the peace-making scale. That’s the only exception for not having a conversation. And this one is perhaps the hardest of all the ways to attempt peace-making. It requires simple forgiveness. And the outflow is that there’s no bitterness or resentment at all towards the other. This one might seem like the easiest, but I think it’s the hardest. And the key to it is your close proximity to practicing God’s presence. you’ll only choose forgiveness to the extent that you recognize you’ve been forgiven. Matthew 18 also talks about that. One of the areas God has grown me in in doing this is in the area of forgiving people for things they say about my adopted kids. There are so many things I could correct people on or challenge their way of thinking but I’ve learned to see people’s comments as generally ignorant in the right sense of the word. So I’m learning to forgive quickly.

If Jesus has forgiven me so much so why hold on to something I can’t resolve and that will eat me up on the inside. I’ve been forgiven much so I can give that same forgiveness.

Now there was an instance just recently in which my feelings were hurt and I processed it for nearly 8 months. The only person who knew of the hurt was my wife. I didn’t tell anyone but I just couldn’t shake it. I became concerned that if I didn’t have a conversation that it would lead me to a place of bitterness and I loved this person too much for that to happen. So before I actually finished preparing this sermon on Friday bc I’m reading this and studying this and I’m like I can’t tell everyone else to do something I won’t do myself so I called this person and we talked through it. and we resolved it. It was honestly a sweet time with a dear brother of mine. I tried to overlook it but I still have a long way to go.

You see overlooking a wrong done towards you takes an incredible amount of trust in God. You have to be deeply rooted and meditating on his goodness. You’ve got to be deeply aware of the depths he has rescued you from and all that he has forgiven you of to be able to do this.

But there’s no option to avoid peace-making. Unresolved conflict will eat you up from the inside out.

Look back at vs 18 (slide above with pic). And as you purse peace, you need to know that yes it is 100% your responsibility to pursue peace and make peace with your fellow believers but sadly peace and reconciliation might not be possible. You see that “If it is possible…” It might not be possible. The bible is 100% realistic when it comes to making peace. Even with your best efforts it might not happen. For whatever reason if the other person is unwilling or unforgiving that doesn’t mean that we puruse it no less fervently. And even though we might not be reconciled to one another forgiveness is always a requirement.

And again this is another one of the hard parts of following jesus. You trust him with your whole life. You give Him access to all parts o f you. You obey him and honor him with your actions; And yet often our prayers for reconciliation seem to fall short; You want so bad for his Spirit to produce forgivenss. But sadly that doesn’t always happen. God gives us the choice to obey but never forces obedience. I see relationships torn apart regularly bc of an unwillingness to forgive; bc of an unwillingness for individuals to see themselves as first sinners who have been sinned against;

So how does one go about making peace? Peace is required of us and listen conflict doesn’t have to be bad. It can actually strengthen us. God can use it as a tool to shape us and refine us. You shouldn’t be scared of it or avoid it. If you’re following Jesus, You have God’s Spirit, you have nothing to be afraid of. Whether you’re the one who has created the conflict or you’re on the receiving end. You have nothing to fear.

So to help us get a little practical…Here are a couple guidelines for you to follow…

When in conflict:

1. Make it your goal to honor and please God (2 Cor 5:9) (add each new one on the same slide)

Simple enough right. I think we all want to do this. 2 Cor 5:9). No matter what we’re doing we seek to please and honor God. What pleasas and honor’s God? It’s no different from how I want my kids to act like me. I want them to have my character. I work hard. I want to instill that in them and see them do the same. I have nice straight lawn mower lnes mowed in the yard I want to my kids do the same thing with the mower. HA. God wants our character to mirror his or said another way he wants us to have his same mind. He wants us to thknk the same way and act the same way…according to his own character. Love, Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, fathfulness and self-control. And listen everytime you head into a conversation you better believe you need remind yourself of this. This becomes a top of mind important thing to repeat to yourself. Listen, if I don’t do this I know that I’ll end up doing the opposite. Several years ago I started to pray that every time I received criticism that I would receive it with an open heart and a shut mouth and you know what I remember everytime I’m criticized. I remember what I’ve been praying for. Then I beg God to help me do it bc it’s hard to not defend yourself and own your own terrible actions. So, ask God to help you honor Him. Before I give you the 2nd one, let me give you a pro tip Don’t send the email or text that just says “Hey can we get together sometime?” and then no explanation. For me this email and text is in the realm of pastoral PTSD as we call it. Go ahead and say something like “Hey, can we get together soon? I want to talk about the thing you said or did (and name the thing).” Just name it and don’t create an ambush. For me, then I can ask God to help me see what I did and get me to a place where I can ask forgiveness much quicker.

1. Repent and seek forgiveness from God and then from the other person for how you contributed to the conflict (James 4:1)

But it wasn’t my fault. Maybe, but I bet there’s still something to repent of. I bet if you ask God to show you he will. But listen this requires humility and a willingness to listen. And what does it mean to repent anyway? It means to turn away from. When you repent to God you’re committing to not doing the same thing again. This means that forgiveness is not just words spoken but perhaps it has some actions to it. Maybe when you’re pressed like I was in the drive-through that fateful day, you respond in an uncaring way and you don’t know why you do that. Perhaps you need to seek counseling to understand why you respond the way you do. Repentance is often very practical.

And if you’re the one who was sinned against; the one whom the conflict is directed. You too seek repentance and forgiveness. You go to God and ask him to help you see that just like he died for your sin, He also died for the other person offense towards you. When you do this you don’t set yourself as judge over the other person and make yourself your best attorney. Again, It’s only in knowing how deeply you’ve been forgiven by God that you will be able to offer forgiveness. Perhaps the action was so hurtful that reconciliation won’t be immediate but forgiveness is not an optional thing to work towards.

1. Seek to Love the other person (Eph 4:32)

Be kind and compassionate towards one another, forgiving one another just as God also forgave you in Christ. This is a taking every thought captive kind of exercise bc often others sin towards us hurts a lot. But rather than bitterness consuming you ask God to help you love the other person. Step out of God’s role of judge and put him back into that seat. What does it practically look like to love when someone decks you with the facebookean left hook? I don’t know exactly. Maybe it’s a $5 virtual gift card for coffee with a little note that says I just want you to know that I care for. Can you imagine the potential restorative effects if something like that happened when followers of Jesus were giving away money to people who say bad things about their views on the internets? A revolution would take place.

But listen, whether you have murdered your friends and family with your words or bitterness has sent you on an anger binge. You need to know this morning that you have been forgiven. God has forgiven you in Christ Jesus. He has buried that past. Now it’s time to create a new future. Will you give him permission to lead you there and then take the practical steps of making peace and learning how to Honor God?

If you’ve been deeply wounded by someone’s words or action you need to know this morning that Jesus empathizes with you. He has felt a similar pain. Jesus was wrongly condemned to die. In Luke 22 Jesus did exactly what the prophet Isaiah said he would do. He was like a lamb before the slaughter. He was mocked and condemned for things he did not do. His passion and his desire was for peace but it wasn’t his own peace. His desire was to bring peace between God and you and me. His desire for peace led him to his death. He understands the way you’ve been wounded. He understands you. You can confidently come to him even in your timidity and hurt.

Lastly, only God can offer true peace. Those pseudo searches for peace. The search and journey to have the thing or things that you desire that you think will bring you fulfillment, power, authority, respect, friends, a spouse, position in the community…those things will draw you into a dessert wasteland. They will end up being the things that put you at odds with others. The Bible says that Jesus was crushed for those sinful pursuits and out of that we get peace with God. That’s the peace we’re looking for. The peace of being at rest at your dad’s side. The never-ending love of God the Father. He loves like that. Meditating and delighting on that love delivers true peace. Nothing else will.

City Church, do not delay in this pursuit. Don’t delay true peace. Do not delay giving it or making it. Offer forgiveness. Receive forgiveness. You have been forgiven.