

THE BIG IDEA: Conflict handled Biblically means the Gospel wins even if we don't.

The Take-Off

Conflict is everywhere, and as we just saw, there are lots of approaches we could use to deal with it.

The key, of course, is that we do actually DEAL WITH IT from a biblical point of view.

Lots of times in the church we deal with conflict like a 2 year-old plays hide and seek: we close our eyes to it and assume no one else will see it either.

But God didn't design us to run from conflict, and in order to convince us of that, he made sure that Acts 15 was included in the Bible you are now holding in your hand.

What's surprising about this chapter is that it contains 2 conflicts, and though they're both handled correctly, they both end very differently.

So my goal this morning is to walk you through the conflicts and then give you some picture metaphors that can help you take away some practical ideas about how we can handle conflict biblically.

1. 2 conflicts

First conflict is in verses 1-35

- It's primarily over salvation and involves spiritual matters
- The Jewish believers wanted to require the Gentile believers to be circumcised (vv. 1, 5)
- As all men in the house know, that is a conflict!!
- One side wants to require it, the other side doesn't
- This is the type of stuff churches split over, but here we see them having a conversation about it in hopes of working it out
- The conclusion? Verse 19 - don't make it hard for people to turn to God
- They tried to lessen the burden, and - not surprisingly - the people were glad for the encouraging message in verse 31 (especially the men)
- It's safe to say this conflict resolution represents the best case scenario

Second conflict is in verses 36-41

- It's primarily over ministry and involves practical matters
- Paul and Barnabas both want to do the same thing (visit the churches) but not with the same person (Mark)
- This conflict basically boiled down to trust (or the lack of it) in someone who had bailed before
- The conclusion? Verse 39 - they had to go different ways
- It's safe to say this conflict resolution doesn't represent the best case scenario

Before we move on, what can we learn from these 2 conflicts that ended so differently?

1. They were real conflicts (the word used for "sharp dispute" in verse 2 is used other places to describe riots)
2. The way they were handled led to different outcomes (agreement and disagreement) but the same growth for the kingdom (verses 33 and 41)
3. So there must be some way to handle conflict in the body that can lead to the continued growth of the kingdom

Here are some metaphors - pictures - that represent 4 ways we can handle conflict.

I think you'll notice 2 things: we use 3 of them a lot but it's the 4th one that's at work in Acts 15 (and needs to be in us, too)

2. 4 metaphors

1. Boxing gloves

- This one is fairly common
- There is only one winner, and it's usually whoever is the strongest
- This type of conflict resolution involves lots of pain
- The main motivation is confrontation

2. Megaphones

- This one is also fairly common
- There is only one winner, and it's usually whoever is the loudest
- This type of conflict resolution involves lots of shouting
- The main motivation is proliferation

3. Guns
 - This one is less common
 - There is only one winner, and it's usually whoever is the fastest (first to shoot wins)
 - This type of conflict resolution involves lots of blood
 - The main motivation is retaliation
4. The cross
 - This one is fairly uncommon
 - There can be many winners, and it's usually whoever is the meekest
 - This type of conflict resolution involves lots of grace
 - The main motivation is reconciliation

3. 1 application

Talk

- To each other, not about each other (Matthew 18:15)
- To each other with others if necessary (Matthew 18:16-17)
- (In context, it's interesting to note that the next 2 promises (binding and agreeing) happen when the church is handling conflict Biblically)
- To each other before you worship (Matthew 5:23-24)

Matthew 5:24 reveals God's heart and the goal: being reconciled to each other

It's more important than our worship and it's more important than our prayers

It all starts with talking with the cross in mind as 2 forgiven followers of Jesus

Isolation leads to rationalization; conversation leads to reconciliation

Reconciliation doesn't mean BFFs as much as it means no bitterness

The Landing

Today's Big Idea says: **Conflict handled Biblically means the Gospel wins even if we don't.**

For the Jews in Acts 15, it meant making less of a big deal about a requirement they thought was important

For Paul and Barnabas, it meant separation from each other

Conflict can be handled Biblically and end very differently, but in both situations the Gospel was advanced, and men's differences were reconciled.

For you, it could mean this morning is the time when you start to talk, especially in light of the fact that we are preparing to share in communion. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

It could mean that you need to be reconciled to God - that most of your problems with men stem from the fact that you are far from God

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 is great news! Jesus was the perfect example of reconciliation and God wants the gap between you and him closed.

That's why communion is so special for believers - we are reminded again that God gave Jesus to draw us near to himself again.

He is not content to be far from us.

This morning, put down the boxing gloves, the megaphones and the guns and take up the cross.

And be reconciled to God and one another.

Talk, and allow the conversation to lead to reconciliation.