

## Handling Conflict at home (Galatians 5:13-26)

### **Introduction**

#### Self-introduction and Prayer

We are continuing with the topic on “Conflict Resolution”. Today we are focusing on resolving conflict in the home. Yes conflict also certainly happens in our homes. I believe you and me are familiar with the following scenes at home.

1. Parents angrily lashing out at their children for one thing or another.
2. Parents and their adult children preparing for marriage fighting over dates and venue/s of the wedding.
3. Husband and wife fighting over which is the best method for disciplining children or what name to give to their new-born baby.
4. Siblings fighting over who is Mum or dad’s favourite.
5. Adult children struggling with feelings of bitterness and a sense of rejection by parents in their upbringing.

I am sure that we all are aware that even in the most loving and caring families, conflict will always be there. The Bible does not hide this fact. Listen to how one writer summarises family relationships in the family in which God’s own son, Jesus Christ would be born.

*“Adam and Eve sinned, and Adam responded by blaming his wife. They parented two male children and one of the sons killed the other. Abraham, God’s chosen married two wives, breaking God’s design for family and he eventually kicked one wife and her child out of the house. Jacob married several wives like his grandfather. His twelve sons eventually sold their young brother into slavery. David too had many wives and his son raped his sister. Then David’s daughter’s brother, Absalom, killed David’s son that raped his sister”. (Bible.org series, downloaded 9/21/2019)*

I am sure this description paints a very different picture from what we would expect from family relationships. It sounds extreme but I need to let you know that this is what sin is capable of doing. The key word in this sad story is that Adam and Eve, our first parents **sinned**. It is their sin that led to all the sour relationships we are still struggling with today.

In our text in Galatians today the apostle Paul will be helping us to understand the source of conflict and how we can avoid improve in our relationships. This is the warning he gives;

*“If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” Gal 5:15).*

### ***Battle between the Spirit and the flesh (13-18)***

Paul starts his teaching from a common Jewish teaching, “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD*” Leviticus 19:18. The question that begs an answer in today’s teaching is, “*Who is my neighbour?* Before you think of the Dlamini next door, your nearest neighbour is your child, parent, wife, husband, brother, sister, aunt, grandmother; the members of your family. He says if the Galatians keep on biting and devouring each other like we also do, they will destroy each other. This poses a question to us right now. In your family, who have you been biting and devouring of late and what is still left of them? What is still left of your relationship with them? All this tearing up of each other, Paul says it happens because we do not love others but we love ourselves.

What happens when we don’t have love for one another in the family? We become critical and judgmental of each other. We stop seeing any good from others but fault after fault. We focus on their mistakes and become blind to the good in them. Paul identifies the problem as the internal war within ourselves as we saw last week when we introduced the topic of conflict in James 4:1. It is the desires and motives of our hearts which cause us to quarrel and fight each other.

Paul says for believers, this internal battle is the battle between the Spirit of God in us and the desires of our flesh (v 16-18). It is this struggle between the desires of our flesh which are self-centred and the Spirit of God that desires us to do that which pleases God. The Spirit of God reins us from destroying ourselves by doing whatever we want (v 17). Can you imagine what sort of world it would be if you and me had the freedom to do “*whatever we want*” If we all say, “My will be done”. We would certainly not only destroy others but even ourselves. Paul warns them that freedom to do ‘what they want’ puts them at crossroads with each other and only leads to fighting and disunity. They can avoid walking on this highway of destruction only by “*walking in the Spirit*” (v 16). Paul is saying the power of the Holy Spirit, will cultivate in them a desire to hear the word of God and obey it. He is calling them to make a choice between two freedoms; the freedom to sin and destroy others and the freedom to serve others and glorify God. Only the Spirit-powered freedom will lead them to relate with one another in a healthy and God-honouring way. Paul offers a remedy to the ruin of the Galatian church, that by not yielding to the rule of the flesh, but submitting to the direction of the Holy Spirit of God, they will learn to serve each other in love.

### ***When evil in our hearts rules us (19-21)***

Paul started by identifying the relational problem between people not as person-person problems but a vertical spiritual problem – the war between the Spirit of God and the desires of human nature. It is a struggle between living for myself and living for God. If my primary goal is not to live to please myself, but to glorify God, then my relationship

with others will be that of serving them and seeking their good. But if I live to please myself (e.g. wanting the wedding venue to come to me as a parent), my relationship with child would be working towards using them to make me happy.

Paul moves on to warn the Galatians about the works born out of the desires to live to please themselves and hence destroy their relationship with others. He draws up a list of all sins that result from the desires of the flesh. Paul is seeking to expose to them the destructive nature of sin that is self-seeking and anti-others ranging from hatred and quarrels to idolatry and witchcraft. All the vices mentioned in verses 19-21 are anti-God and anti-others and therefore breed conflict. The ultimate result of a life driven by our desires apart from the direction of the Holy Spirit is also to live as enemies of God. Paul warns them that those who indulge in such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God. The logic of Paul's argument is that you cannot hate others like members of your family and love God at the same time.

*“Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20).*

Paul points us to the word of God as able to expose the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts so we can see them for what they are – seeking self-glory instead of the glory of God and others. He also wants us to be aware as children of God that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but “against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12). He wants us to understand that our conflicts are not primarily a war against the people we live with, but fundamentally against the sin that wages war in our physical bodies. The result is a harvest of bad fruit in broken relationships and tension in families like husband and wives abusing each other, parents lashing out at their children in anger, children carrying the burden of bitterness towards their parents. All these people get caught up in a vicious cycle of anger, pride, vengeance, self-righteousness, bitterness and hopelessness. Each one of them, according to Paul Tripp always have a “*demand agenda*” instead of a “*restoration agenda*”. The demand agenda causes us to want to use other people for our own good as a result we frustrate them and we are always in conflict. This is bad for relationships and can only be overcome by walking in the Spirit..

### ***When we walk in step with the Spirit (22-26)***

So far we have seen from Paul's teaching that what we live for is what rules our hearts and shapes how we relate with others. If we live to gratify the flesh we find ourselves in conflict with others and with God's will. Paul reminds the Galatians that it is not humanly possible for them to move from a demand agenda to a restorative agenda without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This he says happens when they keep in step with the Spirit (v 25). This means allowing the Spirit to grow in them the fruit of the Spirit, working in their hearts to produce the character of Christ. The Spirit will lead them from

bitterness, anger, rivalry and vengeance to being loving, joyful, patient, kind, good, faithful and self-controlled followers of Christ.

The Spirit would revolutionise their relationships and give them the power to crucify their sinful nature (v 24). In fact Paul says because of the death of Christ on the cross, their sinful nature has already been crucified to give them the freedom from sin. Keeping in step with the Spirit will therefore mean recognizing their identity in Christ and the power they have in Christ over sin. They can no longer remain in bondage to sin because Christ has set them free and given them the Holy Spirit to enable to say No! to sin, No! to anger, No! to bitterness, No to selfishness, No to blaming others, No! to grudges, No! biting and tearing each other apart. The regenerative power of the Holy Spirit would give them the spirit to be more forgiving, more gracious, more loving, more caring, more patient, more gentle with others and above all more Christ-like.

This new life in Christ will open a highway to peace and harmony among them as children of God. The new life in the Spirit would enrich their relationships, transforming them from being self-focused to being God-focused. The fruit of the Spirit would bring the believers into a healthy relationship with God, (true love, joy and peace all these are God-given), a healthy relationship with others (patience, kindness and goodness), healthy personal growth (faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). This should encourage unity and harmony in the body of Christ, against the spirit of biting and devouring each other (5:15). We are reminded here that this new life cannot be accomplished by our human effort but by the grace of God. We are assured of God's grace in giving us the power to reject our old nature of seeking to destroy others and embrace our new nature in Christ to love and serve one another to the glory and praise of God.

### **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, Paul was not only trying to repair damaged relationships among the Galatian church, but was also speaking directly to you and me today and our role in the conflict going on in our homes. He is challenging you and me to examine our hearts and review our relationships with members of our family. It demands action from you and I. Are we going to stubbornly insist that everyone else in our family is wrong, that they don't understand or are we going to self-examine and identify our own contribution to the conflict? God's word is clear on this, it is humility that helps you to accept responsibility for your part in conflict and learning to say "I am sorry" goes a long way in laying the foundation for conflict resolution. May the Spirit of the Lord God Almighty rule our hearts and gives us the desire to serve others and encourage them instead of destroying them.

*To follow our teachings go to [christcentralsoweto.co.za](http://christcentralsoweto.co.za)*

### ***Reflection questions***

Domestic and gender-based violence has become one of the biggest challenges in our society.

1. What heart issues could you possibly point out to be at play in situations of domestic and gender-based violence?
2. How does Paul's teaching on keeping in step with the Spirit help people caught up in a cycle of gender-based violence?
3. Take time to pray for God's intervention to renew and transform our hearts as a community to grow in the fruit of the Spirit that help us to see others as deserving the dignity due to all human beings.