

Seven Keys to Resolving Your Conflict

James 3:17

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As a church, we have committed ourselves to Ten Days of Consecration to the Lord. Those ten days end this Wednesday at sunset. I have found it to be a good time to draw near to the Lord. We have given ourselves to prayer and fasting and extra time in the Word. Since The Day of Atonement or in the Hebrew, Yom (Day) Kippur (Atonement), is Wednesday, I was going to teach on that. It is the holiest day of the year on the Jewish calendar. It was the only day that the High Priest could go into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for sin. Like the other Old Testament sacrifices, it was a shadow of the one final sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross. In the Old Testament the Jews celebrated Yom Kippur in anticipation of Christ's death on the cross for our sins. They did not have a full revelation of how that all connected; but they acted in obedience to God's instruction to them in Leviticus 16, Leviticus 23, and other passages. Today we celebrate the day much like Good Friday on the Christian calendar. It is a time to look back in gratitude for Calvary.

Turn to Hebrews 10 and we will read a few verses from the New Testament that helps us keep these feasts in perspective. Verses 1-4:

*"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."*¹

This is a general statement about the Mosaic Law—the Law was a preparation² and a shadow of the reality that would come through Christ. Hebrews 10:3 is a specific reference to Yom Kippur.³ The perpetual fulfillment of The Day of Atonement happened when Jesus laid down His life on the cross and established the Everlasting Covenant of Grace promised in the Old Testament.⁴

Romans 14:6 says *"He who observes a day, observes it to the Lord..."* That's what we're doing this week. Not out of legal obligation, but we have chosen to set aside these days to seek the Lord and consecrate ourselves to Him. The timing of these feasts is significant because they were appointed by God. They were not just dates that Israel picked to celebrate. They were part of God's covenant with Israel; and God Himself specified when they would be. And God honors the dates He chose. Jesus' death on the cross coincided with the Feast of Passover. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit did not occur, according to Acts 2:1, until the Feast of Pentecost had fully come. The feast dates continue to have significance in God's program.

So here we are today consecrating ourselves to the Lord with prayer and fasting. But our consecration is not limited to prayer and fasting. We are confessing our sins; we are turning from iniquity in every way we know how, and we are getting everything as right as we possibly can. A major factor in all that is making sure our relationships with one another are right. That's what God has led me to address this morning.

Turn with me to James 3:13-18 and I'll explain further.

¹ All Scripture quotes are from New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² Galatians 3:3, 11, 18-25; Romans 3:19-28.

³ Hebrews 10:3 (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblosft).

⁴ Hebrews 10:10-13; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8; 13:20.

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

I have a few relationships that are not everything they ought to be. I have made effort to improve these relationships. They are not open conflict; but still I feel a concern about where they are. So during this Ten Days of Consecration I have asked the Lord to show me what else I might do. In answer to prayer the Lord took me specifically to **James 3:17** *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”* In that description of godly wisdom, I find Seven Keys for Resolving Conflict; I want to share those with you.

1. First Pure: I will first and foremost get my own heart right.

Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see....”* I know it says, *“...they shall see God.”* But I want to talk first about the connection between purity of heart and the ability to see anything clearly. Impure motives distort logic. Jeremiah (17:9) tells us the heart is deceitful. In Obadiah 3 God said to Edom, *“The pride of your heart has deceived you....”*

When the heart is twisted, then our perception of things is distorted accordingly.

A greedy heart fails to see the pain others are experiencing; it's too focused on its own desires.

A lustful heart has tunnel vision; it puts that spin on perfectly innocent statements. Paul said, *“To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.”*⁵

A bitter heart sees life, sees people, through the distortions of that root of bitterness. There is a kind of paranoia that attaches itself to the unforgiveness.

A jealous heart sees and imagines flirting and betrayal where there is none.

We could go on and on.

The danger of deception lays, not so much in other people's ability to distort the truth, as the propensities of our own heart and mind. When the heart is pure, we can see through the deceptions.

In my mediation business, I am amazed at people's inability to hear one another. The person's mind is so preoccupied with his own desires and position, that he can't even hear the other party. All he does is look for opportunity to state his own thinking. Reasoning power is completely out the window. That mindset blocks resolution of conflict. The approach must be different than that.

Purity of heart is primarily about motives. I have to take an honest look at what I'm really trying to get. Am I honestly wanting a fair and equitable solution; or am I just trying to maneuver and get my own way? In the verse just preceding our text, James says, *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”* He is specifically contrasting a pure heart to envy and self-seeking. Webster defines envy as *“Painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.”*⁶ Envy drives most power struggles—people want what somebody else has and they will fight to get it. Immediately following our text James asks, (James 4:1-3) *“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what*

⁵ Titus 1:15

⁶ Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993) p. 388.

you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (NIV).

Why did King Saul try to kill David? David had favor with the people that Saul wanted. They sang, *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"* (1 Sam 18:7). It was a compliment toward Saul; but that wasn't good enough for Saul. He had to have top billing; even though he wouldn't go out and fight Goliath. Still he insisted on having top honors. Envy toward David drove him to do irrational things. *"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."*

Self-interest is an innate condition of humanity. Without a certain amount of that, we couldn't survive. The problem comes in when that dominates our heart. The second great commandment is that *"... You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt 22:39). In other words, our concern for the well-being of others should be like our concern for our own well-being. That's why Paul said in Phil. 2:3-4 *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."*

"First pure...." James says. First in priority and first in order⁷, we must examine our own hearts before we can ever hope to resolve a conflict with somebody else. Jesus said, *"... First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matt 7:5). Notice the relationship again of seeing clearly and dealing with the issues of your own heart. First remove the plank from your own eye, THEN you will see clearly enough to have that conversation with your brother or sister. That's the same thing James is saying.

If we go in to fix the other person, we will probably make matters worse rather than better. What issues in my own heart do I need to deal with first? Is there anger? Is there resentment? Is there unforgiveness? Is there selfishness? *"First pure...."*

2. Peaceable: I will go with the intention of finding peace with the other party.

Not peace at any price, because that kind of peace seldom lasts. But I want to work hard at a resolution that brings lasting peace in our relationship. That's far more valuable than winning the argument, far more important than out-debating the other person, much more valuable than justifying my own actions. The objective set forth in Matthew 18:15 for going to the other party is to restore the relationship. Sometimes people use the process defined in Matthew 18 to simply prove the other party wrong. When that's the motive, the results are usually bad for everybody.

"Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good?" Is the rhetorical asked in Psalm 34:12. The answer is then given. *"Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. 14 Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it."* Do you want to see good all the days of your life? *"Seek peace and pursue it."*

Paul wrote, *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph 4:1-3).

So the first question I have to ask myself is "Are the motives of my heart right? My prayer is therefore Ps 139:23-24 *" Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*

The second question I have to ask myself is "Am I pursuing peace or do I just have a bone to pick with

⁷ James 3:17 (from Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press)

this individual?" If it's the latter, I'm not yet ready to go; I still need to do some soul searching first. The third question I must ask is "How will I approach this person; what will be my manner of approach?"

3. *Gentile: I will behave myself in a gentle, kind manner.*

James and John ran into a conflict as they were traveling with Jesus to Jerusalem. The Samaritans did not want to receive Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. How did James and John want to resolve this conflict? In Luke 9:54 they asked, "*Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?*" They even found chapter and verse to justify their approach. Jesus said to them, "*...You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*" I've got to know what kind of kingdom God has called me to. I've got to understand that He is more interested in the eternal destiny of the people I'm dealing with than me looking good. I cannot operate out of pride or I will be operating out of the wrong spirit. Never in eternity had pride existed until it was found in the heart of Lucifer. I don't want it found in my heart.

What does gentleness look like to you? Think about the way a new mother picks up her infant child. Think about the way she cuddles that child when he cries. Contrast that to grabbing that baby by the leg and yanking him into place.⁸ Gentleness cares about the feelings of the other person. I was trying to help a church in conflict. One of the leaders was offending a lot of people. When I approached him he simply said, "I'm just a blunt person. I let people know what I think." He said that as if it were a virtue. "And how's that working for you?" He had the whole church in a state of turmoil—a lack of gentleness. The fruit of the Spirit is "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control*" (Gal 5:22). If I'm operating in the Spirit, I will be gentle. That doesn't mean I let the other person run over me. I can be firm and gentle at the same time.

4. *Willing to Yield: I will be open to reason.*

KJV says "easily entreated"; NIV says "submissive"; the word could be translated "approachable, persuadable, or open to reason."

Most people confront a conflict with a closed mind. They have already processed the problem through their own lens and perspective. They have come up with the solution they want. Their task then is simply to persuade the other party to accept their solution--bad approach to conflict resolution! Problem is the other party has done the same thing. So you have two competing solutions and two people banging heads with one another. Both parties have to be willing to hear each other and seek creative solutions that reasonably satisfy the needs of everyone involved. That requires some collaboration and maybe some compromise as well.

Some old school leaders think that stubborn leadership is strong leadership. There is a time to be stubborn. But almost always the ability to reason and collaborate with others is stronger and more effective than stubbornness and stonewalling. You may win a few disagreements that way; but it seldom works in the long run. Almost always it will trash your relationships; and as a general statement is contrary to the ways of God.

So I will approach this with an open mind. Perhaps, there is something about all this that I don't know. Perhaps I've framed the conflict in a way that minimizes my contribution to the problem and maximizes their contribution. Perhaps I have conveniently blamed them when some of the blame rests in my corner. I will listen to understand where the other party is coming from.

⁸ Eddie Foster, "Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness" <http://lifehopeandtruth.com/god/holy-spirit/the-fruit-of-the-spirit/fruit-of-the-spirit-gentleness/> accessed 9/19/15. Foster suggests the digging by a professional archeologist as another example of gentleness.

5. *Full of Mercy and good fruits: I will extend mercy to the other party--*

knowing that we all reap what we sow (Gal. 6:6:7).

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” Matt. 5:7.

Maybe the other party is wrong. Maybe the other party is not as humble and repentant as he should be. What if I’m entirely right and the other person is entirely wrong? I’m still wise to be merciful—why? Because I will eventually need some mercy myself.

I’m hoping the other party will come with this *“wisdom from above”* in our text; but if he doesn’t, I will still guard my own heart with all diligence.⁹ I will not let the other person’s behavior define what I do or who I am. I will do what is right because that is who I choose to be!

I will forgive from the heart regardless of whether the other person acknowledges any wrong or not. I will forgive, because I often need forgiveness myself. And Jesus taught us to pray, *“... forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors”* (Matt 6:12). I have seen what unforgiveness can do to a person; and I want none of that. I will forgive because I don’t want to become hardened by bitterness and resentment.

So I will ask God to give me compassion toward the person who seems to oppose me and persecute me.¹⁰ I will be merciful toward that person. Mercy is not something I give because the other person deserves it. On the contrary, mercy is something shown toward a person who does not deserve it.

6. *Without partiality. I will be as objective as I possibly can.*

I will not justify prejudices in my heart. I will not violate justice because one person has more to give than another. In this epistle, James condemned the partiality being shown by the church leaders to wealthy people—giving them a place of honor and esteem simply because they had wealth. In no uncertain terms James calls that sin.¹¹

So as I approach this conflict, I ask myself some hard questions.

Is there any partiality going on in my thinking? If this person were more powerful and influential would I try harder to make the relationship work? Or on the other side of the coin, do I have a prejudice against successful people? Am I resenting this person because I am associating him or her with a past experience with someone else? Am I making unfair generalizations about this person because of race, gender, socio-economic status? Have I allowed an internal attitude toward a general category of people skew my judgement in this situation?

Sometimes to test my own objectivity I have to get counsel from someone outside the conflict—someone who will tell me the truth as he sees it—someone who doesn’t have a stake in the game. And then we have to be able to hear what that person has to say to us.

7. *Without hypocrisy: I will be honest with myself and with the other party.*

Truth gets communicated in hundreds of ways. It leaks out through our words, through our body language; it’s very hard to fake sincerity. But when a person is genuine and sincere, that too tends to come through. Hypocrisy will turn the other party off; sincerity will win them over—even if you’re saying some things they don’t want to hear.

Am I really interested in the other person’s well-being or am I just faking that so that I can get what I want? Am I sincerely trying to find a resolution that meets needs on both sides of the issue? If I am, it

⁹ Proverbs 4:23.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:44.

¹¹ James 2:1-9.

will tend to win cooperation from the other side. I'm not saying the other party will always respond the way they should or the way you hoped they would. But the chances are better when you're sincerely trying to find a mutually satisfying resolution.

So I will examine my own sincerity. I will honestly try to improve the relationship. That may or may not involve a direct confrontation of the conflict. But as much as lies within me, I will pursue peace.¹²

Isaiah 58 and other passages in the Bible make pursuing peace with others a part of our consecration to God. I want to do all I can to be right with people and be right with God. There are awesome opportunities just ahead that I don't want to miss out on.

James 5:17 *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."*

Pray

¹² Rom 12:18 *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."*