

Handling Conflict The Jesus Way

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know about you, but relationships can be really difficult sometimes, can't they? It would be lovely if they were nice and easy all the time, and everyone did exactly what I said and made my life easy.

I'm not the only one who thinks like that. I'm pretty sure most of us think like that. Just think, is there anyone here who has never had a difficult relationship or bad words with anyone or an argument with anyone whatsoever?

No one? No hands? No hands. Yep, that's normal. Relationships, we love if they worked, and we just say to ourselves, why can't they be nice and easy?

Especially when things go wrong, and our human nature wants us to get down in the mud with the people that are throwing mud at us. Very easy to get, crawl down in the mud with people when they're slinging mud at us.

We're going to learn today that the law in the Bible demands fairness, but Jesus says He doesn't even want us to play the game. We know that some of our biggest problems and greatest causes of stress come from the conflict we have with people in our lives, especially with our family, or friends, or work colleagues.

[1 : 28] In our passage today, Jesus looks at three areas where things typically go wrong in relationships, and He gives us a whole new kingdom way of doing relationships differently.

And so we're going to be spending our time looking at how we can handle conflict the Jesus way, handling conflict the Jesus way. And the first area He wants to look at, that we're going to look at together, is about making and keeping promises.

It's the first area of establishing trust and setting the tone for how our relationships with others is going to work. And the question here is, are we going to manipulate people using every trick in the book to get what we want out of them, or are we going to be people of honesty and integrity?

Integrity. We're going to see that Jesus wants us to be truthful and not tricky. Now, tricky is just a word taken from Lord of the Rings when Gollum is talking about the hobbits and how tricky they are.

Now, the hobbits weren't tricky. It was Gollum that was tricky, but you couldn't believe His word because He was out to stab you in the back. We'll have a look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5, verse 33 and 34.

[2 : 54] In the next section of how Jesus wants His people to live, and He's going to juxtapose the way of the world, the way of the law, and His way.

He says, Again, you've heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oaths, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. But I tell you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Now, the Old Testament law was fine as far as it goes. If you're going to make an oath, you must keep it. And everyone knew about that. It was an important part of ancient culture.

We don't take oaths as much today. But by the time of Jesus, the oath-taking had become a form of pretending to be open and honest, but actually having no intention of keeping your word.

And so what people were doing, instead of making vows directly to God, they were substituting God with seemingly lesser and important things, less important things.

[4 : 08] So they were taking oaths by heaven, or by the throne, or by earth, or by Jerusalem. Somehow, not quite directly God, but still linked to God.

And then this allowed them, in their minds, to relax the intention to carry out what they promised. They're being tricky and not truthful. And Jesus is having none of it.

He wants his people to have a whole different level of integrity. And so the goal here is for believers to be so trustworthy in keeping their promises that they don't need to take oaths.

oaths. He sums it up in verse 37. He says, simply let your yes be yes and your no, no. Now, nowadays, we don't really go around taking oaths like they used to, but there is a temptation in Christian circles to seem to be more spiritual and holy than we are so that others think highly of us. At a previous church I was at, there was a church WhatsApp group. Now, Nick and his wisdom, we don't have a church WhatsApp group. There are smaller groups, but this church had a church WhatsApp group.

[5 : 27] And every morning, someone would send a little message from the Bible to encourage each other. That was the purpose of it. And the messages would start as everyone got to work, around about 8 o'clock as that WhatsApp group got going.

But gradually, over the weeks and months, the messages of when someone was reading their Bible and letting everyone else know that they had this great epiphany of their Bible got earlier and earlier and earlier.

So that sometimes my WhatsApp was going off at 5 o'clock in the morning. I'm not sending messages at 5 o'clock in the morning. But it started at 8 o'clock, 7 o'clock, 6 o'clock, 5 o'clock. Eventually, I was sending messages from the previous night for the next morning just so people would know how holy they are and how early they were getting up and how much God was speaking to them.

Meanwhile, the one that used to send messages the earliest was the one having the worst conflict with his partner. It wasn't even his wife and his children, but he was sending messages at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning to let us know how much God was speaking to him.

So some things for us to think about. The goal is for believers to be so trustworthy in their promises, in keeping their promises that they don't need to take any oaths. Parents and grandparents, this is a trap that you can sometimes fall into.

[6 : 44] So be careful of trying to win the love and affection of your children or grandchildren by making grandiose promises that you don't intend on keeping. My dad once promised a Porsche if we could sneeze with our eyes open.

One of those urban myths. And of course, my brother sneezed with his eyes open at school where no one could see, but he knew, he swore, he had sneezed with his eyes open. And my dad had promised a Porsche and this caused, it caused a major rift in their relationship.

It took years to recover from that. My opa used to make promises if we did well at school he was going to send us on a trip overseas and I think he's still waiting for us to do well at school but I'm still waiting for my trip overseas.

But parents and grandparents, be careful of making grandiose promises that you can't keep. You don't need to do that. Let your yes be yes, let your no be no. Young people often make promises of endless and eternal love to the person that they've just fallen in love with.

I promise I will always, always, always love you. Love, love, love, love. You know, the hearts that just run from page to page to page. Be careful about making endless promises of total love before the age of, I don't know, 33.

[8 : 09] The dads can thank me later. But be careful, young and old, of saying things like, I promise I'm going to do this, no, I really mean it, I really, I really, really, really promise, no, I really, really, really, really, really promise.

If you're hearing words like that come out of your mouth, you're not doing what Jesus says, let your yes be yes, let your no be no, do what you say, mean what you say, and then do what you say. You know, Capitonians are the absolute worst at keeping their word, and we've got to watch out for that. We all know that if you get invited, if you invite a Capitonian to a braai or something, if they say no, fine, now we know they mean no. If they say maybe, they also mean no.

And if they say yes, they mean maybe. We don't want to be like that, in fact, we mustn't be like that. If we say we're going to do something, we have to do it.

We don't have to make promises, and oaths, nothing like that. Jesus says, let your yes be yes, and let your no be no. A person who really knows God, and trusts in Him, doesn't need to impress, or manipulate people, to get them to do stuff, or to get them to like them.

[9 : 19] Our trust is in God. We can say yes or no, and mean it, and we don't have to manipulate our way, into good relationships. Don't do that. Just be normal.

As normal as we can be. Now, it's one thing to establish relationships, in honesty and truth, and just be open and honest about who you are, and what's expected of you, and what you expect of the other person.

But what are we to do when others aren't like that, with us? Open and honest. How does Jesus want His people to be, to react, when others hurt, or belittle us?

Are we to take revenge? Are we to stand up for ourselves? We're after all the people of Jesus, this new kingdom, the new kids on the block. Are we to stand up for our rights, and make sure no one can get the better of us?

Well, the next section, in Matthew 5, Jesus says no, we are to be rewarding, not revengeful. We are to be rewarding, not revengeful.

[10:23] Now, the most natural thing in the world, is to want to get back at someone that hurts you. Okay, it's natural. The problem is, well, there's lots of problems with that. One of the problems, is we never want to get back in equal measure.

We say we do. But we always want to get back more, so that they don't do it again. It's always more than what they did. No matter what the law says, and the law says, you're allowed to do some things, but you can't go further than that.

Now, Jesus knows that we've got this problem, that we always want to do more, than when we hurt, we want to hurt back more. Jesus knows this, and that's why he wants to bypass the whole system, of what's called the law of retaliation, or *lex talionis*, you might have heard that phrase, the law of retaliation.

So, verse 38 and 39, you have heard, Jesus says, that it was said, eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth, but, I tell you, do not resist an evil person.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him, the other, also. Now, can I just say, this is one of the most difficult things to do, and in sermon prep, I was like, I'm pretty sure I've turned the other cheek.

[11:38] And then, I really find it hard to remember a time when I've done it. What I do remember, being in a fight, and hitting someone, and then telling him to turn the other cheek, that was a very long time ago, but it is very difficult to do.

But what's Jesus talking about here? Well, one commentator sums it up very well. He says, it's the heart of the command, Jesus says, is to de-escalate, rather than retaliate.

So, if you're in the middle of conflict, de-escalate, rather than retaliate. The true intent, is that we refuse to take justice into our own hands, at all.

Not an eye for an eye, or tooth for a tooth. Refuse to retaliate, rather seek the good of those who harm you. Don't take your own vengeance, let God, the righteous judge, look after things for you. Don't get even. So, you should know by now that, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, it sounds like a, a bloody feud, that's going to continue, but the purpose of it, is that you don't take more than an eye, you're only allowed to take an eye, you're only allowed to take a tooth, but that didn't help.

[12:55] These blood feuds, would continue, and build, and, you mustn't think that these things, are from long ago. I spent some time in Ireland, some years ago, and, with lovely Christian people, lovely Christian people, they were Protestant, and if you know anything about Ireland, there's a big, this is Northern Ireland, there's a big conflict, between Protestant and Catholic, lovely Protestant Christian people, and they could recall, the day that they went somewhere, on this road, up to that corner, of that day, and then these guys came and did this, and, and it happened years ago, and they were ready to, jump straight back into that fight again, if they did the same thing.

Now, Jesus says, not to resist, at all. Now, not resisting, doesn't mean not doing anything. It's not a recipe, to invite abuse, or to be treated, like a doormat.

But it's about, not doing the same thing, back again. The word behind resist, is to stand up against, in the same way, that they came at you. It's rather, responding, when someone is being hurtful, to you, it's responding, in creative ways, that doesn't do the same thing, back in the same way, but still shows, the other person, that their actions, or words, are in the wrong.

So, for example, that backhand slap, that he talks about, back in the day, that was a, a sign of, humiliation. For you to get, a slap to your right cheek, normally it would be, your right hand is a dominant hand, and so if you, if you see someone, slapping someone like that, it's a backhand slap. It's not just a forward slap, it's a, it's a sign of humiliation. In fact, it's still like that today. It's like, in the ancient world, where the knights, would take a glove, and slap a person, across the face.

[14 : 56] Now you, that means the duel, is about to happen. You don't just do that, it's, it's totally humiliating them. Because treating them, like someone smaller than you, can't take a, a proper fight. And so, that backhand slap, is about humiliation.

So Jesus is saying, no. If I want you to respond, don't take a backhand slap, take a backhand slap, but then turn to him, the other cheek. Because then you're dealing, with them as an equal. You're saying, no. I'm not going to be, belittled by you. I'm not going to fight you, but I'm not going to let you, just get away with, belittling me. And now there's two people, and you've slapped me in the, in the, not in the humiliating way, and now we wonder, what's going to happen. Because I'm still standing strong. Then that other point, about taking the shirt. See where he says, verse 40, if someone wants to sue you, and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And what's happening there, you actually, in those days, you only had two pieces of clothing on you. You had a shirt that was against your skin, a long shift, and then a cloak that you wore over that. So if someone took your, your, your, your, your shirt, at least you still had your cloak, and Jesus is saying, no, give them your cloak as well.

[16 : 08] But immediately, what's going to happen there, is that you're going to be standing naked. Didn't have underwear, like we do in our days. You'd be standing naked, and the guy that was trying to shame you, is not standing there, with all of your clothes.

And everyone is watching him, and going now, but, who's the one that's really, going to be shamed in that situation? I'm not saying that Jesus is saying, we must do this.

He's using provocative ways, to get us to think, how we can creatively, respond to when people, belittle us, or hurt us. Now, can I just say, that this is impossible, to do in our own strength.

The only way, you can overcome the impulse, to revenge, is to have Jesus, in your life. Not just Jesus' words, but actually have him, in your life. And that's because, he went through the exact, same thing, for us.

So Peter, writing, 1 Peter chapter 3, says this, Do not repay evil, with evil, or insult, with insult. On the contrary, repay evil, with blessing.

[17 : 20] Because to this, you will call, so that, you may inherit, a blessing. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good, rather than, for doing evil.

For, Christ, Christ, also suffered, once for sins, meaning you, the righteous, for the unrighteous, to bring you, to God.

And so, that's what Jesus, has done for us, his people. He's taken a hit for us, a massive hit, cost him his life. But along the way, we'll, we'll, we'll go through this, in the book of Matthew, Jesus is, slandered, and persecuted, and very badly treated, especially at the time, of his passion.

But he did it, for a purpose, to bring us to God. Can you imagine, what would have happened, if Jesus had decided, no, it's time to fight back. Like in the movies, you know, the action movies, where the action heroes, just finally had enough.

John Wick 4, if you know what I'm talking about. And he takes out his, swords and spears, and he just goes, Jean-Glaude Van Damme, on the people.

[18 : 37] Then we wouldn't have had the cross. And the cycle, of conflict, and abuse, and retribution, would have continued. Can you imagine? No Christ, no cross, no Christian, for 2,000 years.

The world is in a bad place, as it is, and take the salt, and take the light out, for 2,000 years, and remove it. Wonder how bad society would be.

So, if we trust Jesus, that God will do what he says, that God will pay back evil, for evil, and give us a blessing, if we repay back evil, with a blessing, then ask yourself, when did you last, turn the other cheek?

When did you last, go the extra mile? And not just for your friends, and family, that's easy to do, for someone, you didn't, want to do it for.

This should be a lifestyle, for us as Christians, a way of life, that we're known for. But there's too many of us, who are too quick, to fight back. Want to fight fire with fire, word for word, tit for tat, whatsapp for whatsapp, email for email, poke for poke, kick for kick, ugly word for ugly word, and more.

[20 : 05] We are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. It's a sacrificial, it's a hurtful thing, to not get back at someone.

You're going to be hurt. Jesus knows this. That's why he says, those famous words, deny yourself, don't put yourself first, take up the cross, that's going to cost you, and follow him.

That's actually a good exercise, to repeat, when you're faced with conflict. Someone's, saying bad words at me, someone's hurting me, physically. I'm going to deny myself, I'm going to take up my cross, I'm going to follow Jesus.

It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good, than for doing evil, for Christ suffered, once for sins. The righteous, for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. Now this is, so difficult to do by myself. I'm going to need help doing this. Yes, the Holy Spirit, yes God, yes pray, but we're going to need each other, to do this well. So if you see someone struggling, or if you are struggling, and you don't quite know, how to be creative, your normal, elbow reflex is kicking in, just ask for help.

[21 : 30] Say listen, I really feel like, wringing this person's neck. What can I do differently? Okay. Or if you think you've got, a very creative solution, just go and check. They're going to tell you, yes, that's a nice try, but there's probably a better way, it might be a better way, of doing what you're thinking of doing.

It's very worth, speaking to Christians, to ask for help, in this circumstance. Okay. Reward, be rewarding, not revengeful. Don't take an eye for an eye, but give, in a good way.

Now those responses, often have to do with people, who are in our immediate family, that's, I find that's where, I have the most conflict, sometimes with friends.

But what about people, who really want to hurt you? How do we deal with those people, who seem to be our, actual sworn enemy? Now I don't know, if you've ever had those, in your life?

We tend to think of anyone, who says something nasty, as our sworn enemy, don't we? But maybe you've had, a real, real, real enemy, in your life. It could be someone close to you, who's abusing you badly.

[22 : 47] It could be someone, who's trying to do you in business. Or maybe it's just someone, of a different skin color, or culture, or sex. It happens. It's the world we live in.

How does Jesus want us, to respond there? Well the last point, we're going to look at, is that, Jesus wants us to be loving, not hateful. Loving, not hateful. And, you know, here Jesus gives us, the most, kind of easiest, conflict, strategy, to do, or to understand, I should say.

It's the easiest, to understand what we should do, but it's, the most difficult, to do. It's in fact, impossible to do. So have a look, at verse 43, and 44. You have heard, that it was said, love your neighbor, and hate your enemy, but, I tell you, love, your, enemies, and pray, for those, who persecute you.

Now just so that you know, love your neighbor, is a quote from the Old Testament. Hate your enemy, is not a quote from the Old Testament, that is, just, as with the oaths, that we saw earlier, it's just how the, the culture around Jesus, they had understood those words, if you can, you can love your neighbor, but if they're not your neighbor, and they're your enemy, then you must go for them.

In fact, there's a whole group, of, Israelites at the time, was withdrawing from society, waiting for the kingdom of God, to come, but they were kind of, on the apocalyptic, side of things, and God was going to come, and take revenge, and, they had, their, their, their, their, sort of, scriptures that they looked at, which were, apart from the Old Testament scriptures, had this line of, you know, you love the children of light, but hate the children of darkness.

[24 : 33] Love the children of light, but hate the children of, meaning, love everyone in my group, everyone outside our group, you can go ahead, and hate them. And so Jesus is reacting to that.

Yeah, the Bible says, love your neighbor, you think you should hate your enemy, I'm telling you, love your enemy, and pray for those, who persecute you. Now, there isn't really much, to explain here, other than, for us to just go ahead, and do it.

And of course, it's really, it's one of the most impossible things to do. Again, too many Christians are all too happy, to take eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth, and to hate the enemy.

They too eagerly focus, on Old Testament texts, that asks, God to kill the enemies. We're going to come across those, in the Psalms, if we haven't already. And they are there.

And they focus on those texts, and they don't think about, thinking about these texts. First, taking it through, what Jesus actually says, to love our enemies, and to be like God, who brings rain, and sunshine, on good and bad alike.

[25 : 50] Now, Jesus knows, this is a tall order, to do. And so what he does, is he brilliantly brings it, within our reach, to love our enemy, he gives a, a really helpful, practical, thing to do.

Verse 44, love your enemies, and pray, for those, who persecute you. And so the best thing, you can do, to love your enemy, if you're not good, at doing it, and many of us aren't, bring your enemy, to God in prayer.

Best thing you can do, bring your enemy, to God in prayer. Let it start there. I have found this, the most effective way, of getting my heart, to stop hating my enemies, and at the same time, to get my actions, to be more loving.

I can give you, numerous examples of this, in my life, I don't know if you, just think of your life, and see if that isn't true for you. You've had someone, really come at you, friend, family, work colleague, and if you start, praying for them, you see how that relationship, changes without you, doing anything.

I had a big issue, with a work colleague once, many, many years ago, and, it escalated, and I tried, the tit for tat route, nothing was working, and it was going on, for months and months, you know, that cold shoulder, trying to, get one up, trying to make them, look bad the whole time, they're trying to make me, look bad, and the strangest thing, it escalated over, a page, that hadn't printed properly, the smallest thing, and I was like, after a while, I was like, this just isn't working, and I don't know how, I got to the place, but by God's grace, it's like, ah, I'm just going to give it over, to God, because every time, I try and do something about it, it just gets worse.

[27 : 43] I've shared this kind of thing before, but it really works. All I did, I just handed it over to God, and I said, Lord, I'm just, I don't know, I can't fix this situation, every time I do, it makes it worse.

You speak to this person, in their own time, I'm going to try my best, to be friendly, and non-confrontational, that's all I'm going to try and do. This had been going on, for months, up to a year, you know, within two weeks, it was fixed.

In two weeks, that person came to me, and apologized, but it wasn't, well, it was partly because God had spoken to them, but I was being nicer to them. So it gave them the opportunity, to come and be nice back to me, instead of me trying to get at them.

And all it did, was doing what Jesus did, go and pray for them. I was nicer, and they apologized, and we got on just fine, and we look back, and we think, how silly were we?

But the main thing, that will help us, Jesus says, is to realize, who God is. Yes, we're going to pray for our enemies, but we also need to realize, who God is.

[28 : 48] He takes us, back to God's character. So verse 45, love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons, of your father in heaven.

That you may be sons, of your father in heaven. He causes his son, to rise on the evil, and the good, and sends his reign, on the righteous, and the unrighteous.

The truth that God is good, to all of his creation, is the only reason, we can do anything close, to what Jesus wants. Because if it weren't for God's love, for undeserving sinners, we simply wouldn't have the inclination, or the power, to even attempt, to go and make, friends with our enemies.

To be perfect, as Jesus says, as your heavenly father is perfect. Paul, knows all about this. He, saw the church as his enemy.

Jesus changed him. And then he realized, that he's got to love these people. Even Christian Jews, at that time, would have thought of pagans, as their enemies, non-Christian Jews, as their enemies.

[30 : 12] With, understandable, the Romans, had done some terrible things, in Palestine, in Judea. And they had to be taught, no, even the outsiders, the pagans, the ones who are trying to hurt you, I love them, and I want you to love them.

Romans 5 says this, Paul writing, you see, he says, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for, for the ungodly, for you, for us.

Very rarely, will anyone die, for a righteous person, though for a good person, someone might possibly, dare to die. But God, demonstrates his own love, for us in this, while we are still sinners, Christ died for us.

God reconciles us to him, while we are still his enemy. That is the only way, you can make, a friend out of your enemy. You can't wait for them, to want to be your friend.

You've got to love them first, and the only way, you can do that, is if you've got this kind of love, in your heart. The kind of love, that realizes, that I was God's enemy. He didn't wait for me, to become his friend, he just came and got me.

[31 : 31] While we are still sinners, Christ died for us. And so to take Jesus' words to heart, about how to handle conflict, we need to take Jesus, Jesus, into our heart.

The only way, to be anything like Christ, is to trust him, as our Lord. To trust him, as the one who came, to change the world, to make a payment, for your sins, your problems, your conflict, your anger, your lack of self-control.

To make a way, back to God, so that, we could have a way, to bring, being our original selves, the goal of our creation. In fact, that's what, to be perfect means. It's a, it's a, it's a, it's a goal orientated word.

Be the person, that you were originally created to be. Loving, and forgiving, forgiving, just like God is, towards people, who didn't like him.

Patience, and long suffering. Think about the patience, and the long sufferingness of God, that he, spent, thousands of years, putting up with the Jews, so that you could be saved.

[32 : 41] And another thousands of years, putting up with your family, that was messed up, so that he could be nice to you. to take their injustice, that's aimed at us, reflect it, reflect it, onto God in prayer, and to trust the one, who judges all things justly, and to put that into practice.

That's the only way, that we're going to, de-escalate, and manage conflict, the way that Jesus does. I just want to leave us, with a story, from St. James Massacre, to show us, that Christians, can indeed respond, to hate, and hurt, with the perfection of God.

This is, from a news article, that was run, that was the 30th anniversary, of the St. James Massacre. Bishop Atif reports, how, Davi Ackerman, who was a father, and a husband, was having, a heart-rending conversation, with his three children.

He had just returned, from the hospital, to tell his family, that their mom, Marita, had died. Bishop Atif, sees this, as he walks, into the church, he comes back, Davi Ackerman, comes back, puts his arms, around his kids, and says to them, your mom has just died.

As soon as, he says those words, someone from one, of the news platforms, puts a camera, in his face, a microphone, under his mouth, and says, what have you got to say? What would you say? I'm eating that, I'm, I'm, I'm, you can't ask me, to say something now.

[34 : 27] But you can, say this, if you're a Christian, I don't know, who you are, this Davi Ackerman, responds, I don't know, who you are. I don't know, why you've done this.

you've taken away, you've taken away, from me my wife, you've taken, from me, my children, you've taken, from my children, their mother, but in the name, of Jesus Christ, I forgive you, and I want you, to turn yourself in.

How is that? Reverend Ross Anderson, had this to add, if you have experienced, God's forgiveness, forgiveness, that goes a long way, in helping you, to forgive someone else, that has done, these things to you.

Love is the only force, that can transfer, an enemy, into a friend, and out of a situation, like that, bring genuine peace. It's doable, if you trust in Christ, and ask each other, for help.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, when we, think of the conflicts, we endure in our life, with people, who we think, are our enemy, Lord, it's nothing, absolutely nothing, compared to the conflict, we had with you, before we became, saved, before you decided, to save us, and make, us into your friend.

[36 : 05] And so Lord, there are so many conflicts, in our life, that don't compare to that, help us, to be people, of honesty, and integrity, not to take revenge, but to look how we can, reward, and love, and bless, and help us, not to hate, but to love our enemies.

Amen.