

Discussion Questions:

September 15, 2024

1. What was the most meaningful part of today's message? Why?
2. What part of today's message challenged you the most? Why?
3. What is one thing you will be praying this week for FGCI?
4. Would you consider taking a trip overseas to serve with FGCI?
5. Would you consider a special financial gift to encourage and support the financial ministry of FGCI this month?
6. Before today, did you know about FGCI and what they accomplish?
7. Which mission that the Ord Christian Church supports do you connect with the most? Why?
8. Read Acts 1:8. There are 3 specific locations mentioned, Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, the ends of the earth. Each of these locations represent, a home base, and extended reaching region, and global missions. Are you involved in any missions efforts that encompass all three?
9. Have you prayed for your red-chair person yet today? This week? Can you share who that person is with someone else to pray also, or hold you accountable in your efforts?
10. Do you have a favorite Missionary account?

Rules of Engagement

by Shawn McMullen

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Conflict is as old as human history.

Adam and Eve found themselves in conflict with their Creator in the Garden of Eden. Cain engaged in conflict with his brother, Abel, which resulted in murder. The children of Israel rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the desert. Old Testament kings clashed with Old Testament prophets. Jesus sparred with teachers of the law. Roman authorities and Jewish religious leaders persecuted the early church.

Even the early church, as it found its way in the world, encountered conflict. The Greek speaking disciples accused the Hebrew speaking disciples of discrimination in the distribution of food to needy widows (Acts 6). Later, Paul and Barnabas, two faithful missionaries, disagreed so strongly about John Mark's role in their ministry that they parted ways (Acts 15).

We're not strangers to conflict today, either. Look around you. Nations go to war against other nations. Political parties rage against one another. Churches split. Families fall apart. People war against their own souls.

Faced with the inevitability of conflict, how should Christians conduct themselves? What are our rules of engagement? With Scripture as our frame of reference, here are some, but certainly not all, of the rules.

Choose your battles wisely.

Sometimes conflict catches us off guard. On other occasions we choose it. Paul cautioned Timothy, "Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people" (2 Timothy 2:23-24, NLT). The simple principle here is to avoid unnecessary arguments. We don't have to be proven right. We don't have to have the last word. Sometimes it's best to walk away; to refuse to engage.

Don't take the bait.

When people find themselves in conflict with someone, often their initial response, wittingly or unwittingly, is to degrade their opponent. It's easy to take the bait. But Scripture reminds us that the wise and quietly confident Christian isn't easily offended. "A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted" (Proverbs 12:16).

Control your tone.

In the throes of a heated conversation, our natural tendency is to raise our voice. We want to be heard, and we want to be heard over our opponent. But what if we chose to lower our voice rather than raise it? What might happen to the tone of the conversation then? The writer of Proverbs gives us a hint: "A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare" (Proverbs 15:1).

Listen first.

Some people initiate conflict because they want to be heard. A person feels slighted, overlooked, or ignored. In many cases we can ease tensions simply by being better listeners. Author and motivational speaker Stephen Covey was known for saying, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." James gave us another perspective when he wrote, "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires" (James 1:19-20).

Pay it forward.

Conflict has a way of exposing the raw edges of our emotions. We disagree. We feel belittled and betrayed. We become angry, hurtful, and unforgiving. Many friends and family members who no longer speak to one another can point to a single, unresolved episode of conflict that led to the rift. But even when the situation seems beyond repair, there is hope. Paul wrote, "Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). You may think it's impossible to forgive someone who seriously hurt you,

but remember, it's not your work to perform. It's the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. As you surrender to him, he gives you the capacity to forgive—just as God forgave you through Christ. Receive the grace, mercy, and forgiveness Jesus gave you, and pay it forward.

Value discretion and sensitivity.

When you're at odds with someone, it's tempting to draw battle lines and invite sympathizers into your camp. We want people on our side. But the Bible teaches that there is a better, more effective way to work through conflict. Jesus said, "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back" (Matthew 18:15). There is more to the process, but this first step Jesus taught is a powerful conflict preventer. If you've been hurt by another believer, address the issue privately and at the earliest possible stage. If the offending person repents and apologizes, your relationship can be restored and potential problems can be avoided.

Let God handle it.

"Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:18-19). Can you think of any scenario where you could do a better job of handing out justice than God? Leave it to him.

Don't underestimate the value of a transformed life.

We could add more to the list. But a list is only part of the equation. There is something available to us that is greater, something far more powerful than rules and guidelines. That something is the transformed life of the follower of Christ. When we have surrendered to Jesus, when we are living solely for his glory in the power of his Spirit, he changes us. God's Holy Spirit works in us and through us to bring about the life God desires. And as the writer of Proverbs wisely points out, "When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them" (Proverbs 16:7).