

Interpersonal conflict, conflict between two people, is one of the toughest things in life to deal with. Would you agree with that? I heard somebody say once, and I think it’s true, that when you have an argument with someone, you often spend the rest of the day replaying it in your mind. When you have an interpersonal conflict with someone, it can make you feel worn down mentally and even physically.

Have you ever experienced an interpersonal conflict before? Maybe you had or are having a conflict with a co-worker. Maybe that co-worker has some habits that get on your nerves or maybe you feel like they often leave their work undone and it ends up falling on you. Maybe you’ve had open arguments with that co-worker, arguments that have left feelings hurt and problems unresolved.

Or when you think of interpersonal conflicts you might think of conflicts with your spouse. Maybe spending habits are a source of contention. Or maybe you find yourselves in constant arguments over anything at all.

Or maybe your interpersonal conflict is with someone at church. Maybe a disagreement over a decision has created hard feelings.

What should we do when we have interpersonal conflicts at work or at church or at home? God’s word today addresses the subject of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal conflict.

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, God brought them to Mount Sinai and he told them, “You are going to be my special people.” And as God’s special people, God wanted them to be an example of godly living to all the other nations. Our lesson for today begins, “**The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy, because I the LORD your God am holy’**” (Leviticus 19:1-2). One of the ways in which God wanted the Israelites to be an example of godly living, was in the way they treated one another. And so God told them, “**Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself**” (Leviticus 19:18).

The command, “Love your neighbor as yourself” should govern all our interactions with other people. So when you have an interpersonal conflict, the most important thing is to love the other person. If you love the other person, then everything else can follow.

But you might say, “How can I love that person! That person is like my enemy!” Jesus addressed that subject once. He said, “**You have heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy, ‘But I tell you, ‘Love your enemies.’**” (Matthew 5:43-44)

But you might say or at least think, “How can I love my enemies?” The key is to remember the great love that God showed to you. The Bible says that while we were God’s enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son (Romans 5:10).

So the key is to love the other person and that’s based on the love that God showed us. What are some practical ways that you can “love your neighbor as yourself” when you are having a conflict with that person? Well, let’s think about the words, “Love your neighbor *as yourself*.” We naturally see things from our perspective. Loving your neighbor as yourself means seeing things from the other person’s perspective. There’s always a reason that the other person is acting the way they are, it will help us resolve the conflict if we are at least aware of that reason. Make an effort to stand where they are standing and see things from their perspective. When you make the effort to do that, you are loving your neighbor as yourself.

There are a lot of things that love for our neighbor will prevent us from doing. There are a lot of “Do not’s” in our passage for today. “**Do not go about spreading slander among your people**” (19:16). Often, instead of talking to that person, we complain about that person behind their back. That harms their reputation. It doesn’t show love to the other person to complain about them behind their back.

“Do not hate your fellow Israelite in your heart” (Leviticus 19:17). When there is not love there, hatred in the heart can grow and fester. And that is dangerous to our own souls. The New Testament warns us, **“Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him” (1 John 3:15).** If we let hatred grow, it can be harmful to our own relationship with God.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people” (Leviticus 19:18). When someone does something to wrong us, we hold it in our hearts for a long time. But the problem with that is when we hold in our hearts the wrongs that others have done to us, when we collect them one by one and pile them up in our hearts, then there starts to be no room for the love our God in our hearts. Instead of keeping in your hearts the wrongs others have done to you, be filled with the love God has for you. When you are filled with the love God has for you, then there is no room for you to keep the wrongs others do to you. When you are filled with the love God has for you, then you can overflow with love to others.

But you might think, “Well, does showing love to the other person mean that I never bring up an issue with them?” No it doesn’t mean that. In fact it says, **“Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in their guilt” (19:17).** “So that you will not share in their guilt” means that if our brother or sister in Christ is caught in a sin, we actually have the responsibility to point that out to them. It’s the ultimate show of love to them to say to them, “You’re caught in this sin and I’m concerned about you.”

Sometimes the issue is not a sin, it’s just an issue that needs to be talked about. Whether it is a sin or simply an issue that needs to be talked about, there is a lot of value in honest, straightforward conversation. **“Rebuke your neighbor frankly”** means that we should have honest, straightforward conversation with the other person. Some commentators pointed this out to me: Instead of hating the other person in your heart and holding a grudge against them, and complaining about them behind their back, it’s better to simply have an honest and straightforward conversation with that person.¹ That’s more constrictive. Honest and straightforward conversation leads to more conflicts getting solved. Of course my honest and straightforward words need to be governed by love. Love is the key. But when you talk plainly, you might find that assumptions you had about the other person were not correct. When you show love to the other person, when you talk with them honestly and openly and straightforwardly, when you say that you’re sorry when you are wrong, then there is opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation, then new paths forward open up.

My son James loves to draw, but sometimes he’ll start a drawing and at the beginning he’ll make a mistake and he’ll say to me, “I need another piece of paper!” And I’ll say to him, “It’s just a little mistake. You have all this space left on the paper. You can’t get a new piece of paper every time you make a little mistake!” But he says, “No! I need a new piece!” Or sometimes he will accidentally tear or rip the paper and he’ll come running to me saying, “Oh no! Oh no! Oh no! Can you fix it!?” Now the analogy isn’t perfect because it *is* acceptable to him if I’m able to fix the tear with tape, but sometimes I wonder if we treat our interpersonal conflicts like James treats his paper. If there is a mistake or a tear in the relationship, we’re tempted to be done with the relationship. Now I certainly don’t mean to make light of the interpersonal conflicts that you face. There are often real tears with real pain. But we have a real Savior who can bring real healing. Think of the example we would be to the world if our tears could be healed in Christ. Think of the example we would be to the world if instead of throwing the paper away when we make a mistake, we use the rest of the page to paint the world a picture of Christ. Because when we see his love and when we see him clearly, that inspires us to show love to our neighbor. Amen.

¹ D. A. Carson, “James,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 999; Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 268; M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 53f. Quoted in Wenham, *Leviticus*, 24, 265.