

Speaker 1: [00:08](#) Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrews Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. Today, we're going to be thinking about some practical steps that we can take when it comes to resolving conflict in our lives and drawing these lessons from the letter that Paul wrote to the Ephesians. We're going to be thinking specifically about chapter four, verses 17 to 32. And we know, don't we, that it is absolutely impossible to avoid conflict in our lives. On a global scale, we see that humanity is really sadly hardwired into conflict, and we've only got to listen to the news each day to see the truly destructive and chaotic conflict situations that have become so normalized across the world. And our local communities as well are often scarred by conflict between various groups, whether that's political or racial or for some other reason. And of course in our personal lives as well,

Speaker 1: [01:23](#) conflict arises so easily at work or at home with the family or even amongst friendship groups. It's conflict, conflict, conflict. It seems to be ever present in our lives, ever present in our world. But as we think about this topic though, it's important really for us to recognize that, actually, conflict isn't necessarily bad and that the vast majority of conflict is actually really good indeed. Now I say that because the created world in which we live only physically survives and thrives as a result of conflict. Um, at the most basic level we think about cells dividing, for instance, you know, that process being the result of physical conflict with matter fighting against itself that leads to the creation of a new cell. Um, we can think about the process of evolution, which is of course the ultimate theory of conflict leading to change and growth and adaptability.

Speaker 1: [02:30](#) And of course it's the, it's the same in new ideas as well. There can be no new thinking, there can be no advancement of ideas without conflict, because newer ideas arise when we look at a current situation and we come into conflict with it through critique and reevaluation, and as people argue with one another in a, in a constructive way, exploring different opinions, different ways of doing things, so that conflict brings a synthesis of thinking that produces new ideas and developments. And of course, constructive conflict is at the very heart of our democracy in the United Kingdom as well. Democracy is such a beautiful thing and it is to be treasured and it is to be respected, and the democratic system is partly so amazing because we actually pay people to oppose the Government of the day. We have this incredible concept called Her Majesty's Opposition. Uh, it's amazing when you think about it.

Speaker 1: [03:40](#) Democracy is built on the fact that we actually want a group of people to oppose the Government in order to create argument and conflict so that ideas and thinking and plans get refined. Whether the Government of the day is Tory or Labour or whatever else might emerge in the coming decade, we want a strong opposition to create constructive conflict so that our democracy is strengthened. Now I could go on giving examples, but you get the point. Conflict is actually part of the natural order of things. Um, and so can be good. So I don't believe that as Christians, we are called in any way to avoid conflict. Um, if the church avoided conflict, it would never be honed. It would, it would never grow. And if we as individual Christians avoid conflict, we would never become more spiritually disciplined as we seek to live out the holy life to which we are called. So we're not looking to avoid conflict when it is a constructive thing, but we do need to know how to resolve conflict when it occurs. And that is an entirely different thing. So what do we learn about how to resolve conflict from Paul's letter to the Ephesians? Well, I want to think about this in two parts.

Speaker 2: [03:40](#)

Speaker 1: [05:33](#) Firstly, in order to resolve conflict in a constructive way, I think we need to understand the basic source of conflict. And I'm not talking about the direct cause of any specific conflict itself. You know, whether a couple are disagreeing about where to go on holiday next year, or whether a pupil is arguing with the teacher about doing her homework or whatever. I'm talking about something far more fundamental than that, which is this, that the stance that we often take in conflict situations, if it is an unhelpful stance, is often driven by self protection and self interest. Now in the Bible, we find different terms to describe this. Sometimes it's called the flesh. Sometimes it's called the old self. But the basic idea is that there is within each one of us, um, an ego that wants to protect its own interests from any perceived harm. And the natural response of the ego, when it senses conflict, is to sort of pull up the drawbridge and prepare for the fight in self defense.

Speaker 1: [06:58](#) So we might be opposed to change, for example, for the reason that we are more comfortable with the way things have always been. Even if we know in our heart of hearts that that's not sustainable. We might be frightened of new ideas because they challenge what we've always believed and we are comfortable with our old beliefs, even if we know in our heart of hearts that they may not be watertight. We might force our own way in a situation either through aggressive behaviour or passive aggressive behaviour because we want to retain control over

that situation or we want to retain control over the other people involved. And now these are all behaviours that come from the ego, or what the Bible calls the flesh or the old self. But Jesus says in Mark's Gospel that the daily lifestyle of the Christian involves dying to the self, suppressing the flesh.

Speaker 1: [08:09](#)

Denying the ego, as Jesus puts it: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the Gospel will save it." So we have to die to self in order to find our true identity as a child of God. We won't ever find our true identity, we won't ever discover our destiny as human beings, all the time that we allow the ego to rule in us at the expense of our spiritual journey with God. We won't ever be able to resolve conflicts all the time that we approach those conflicts from the position of ego rather than from the position of spirituality. As Paul says in this passage from Ephesians chapter four, the old self, the flesh, the ego is "hallmarked by futile thinking, darkened understanding, ignorance and hardening of the heart."

Speaker 1: [09:30](#)

So if we want to resolve conflicts in our lives, we need to abandon the ego position and find a new way to approach these problems. And at the heart of the biblical story is that when Jesus died on the cross, he took our old selves, he took our flesh, he took our egos and he crucified them. And when we are united with Christ, the old has gone and the new has come. Our old selves have been crucified with Christ and now we are able to live a new life in union with him. The power of the old self has been broken and we no longer need to live under the control of the ego unless we specifically choose to do so. We have been renewed. A clean heart has been placed into us. We are new creations. We are children of God, and every time we enter a situation of conflict, um, we have a choice. We can either go into that conflict from a position of ego or we can go into that conflict from the strength of our new being in Christ. The choice is always ours. And in this passage from Ephesians four, Paul goes on then to outline five attitudes that can underpin our approach to conflict if we seek to act out of our spiritual being rather than our ego. And what I want to do in this podcast is to briefly look at each of these five attitudes.

Speaker 1: [11:24](#)

Firstly, we are reminded that if we want to resolve conflict, then we need to speak out of truth and not lies. In Verse 25, Paul says, "each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour." Now, we've got to be really careful with this notion of truth because it's always been the case, and it's increasingly so in an age of powerful social media, that some

people use truth as a weapon to hurt others. We can say something quite nasty or we can expose something that brings shame on someone and we justify it by saying, "well, I'm just saying it how it is." But you know, some things don't need to be said. Some situations don't need to be shared with other people. There's a great maxim, I think, to live by, which is before saying anything at all, ask yourself three questions. Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it kind? And if you can't answer "Yes" to all three of those questions, then just don't say it. Truth is always important when seeking to resolve conflict, but it must be truth spoken in love, not truth spoken to beat the other person down or to gain the upper hand.

Speaker 1: [13:02](#)

Secondly, if we want to resolve conflict, then we've got to express our anger properly. The key thing to see here is that anger is not a sin. It's not wrong to be angry. And of course the Bible reminds us that we worship a God who gets angry, so we mustn't feel guilty if things make us angry. It's an emotion that human beings have because we are made in the image of God. But in verse 26 of Ephesians Four, Paul writes this, he says, "Do not let your anger lead you into sin". So when we're in a situation of conflict, it's okay to feel angry. But we need to be honest with one another when we do feel angry and the critical issue is this, what will we do with our anger? Will our anger lead us to say unkind things? Will our anger lead us to accuse and point the finger at others? Will our anger lead us to stew in hateful and vengeful thoughts? Anger itself is not sinful. But unless we guard our anger and express it appropriately, it will lead us into sin. So there's no point pretending that we're not angry. That's only gonna make us boil up inside. But the challenge then is to express our anger in a godly, helpful manner that seeks resolution rather than seeks to further exacerbate the conflict.

Speaker 1: [14:56](#)

Third, if we want to resolve conflicts, I think we need to develop a generous spirit. Verse 28 of Ephesians 4, Paul writes this, he says, "You must have something to share with those in need." Now the ego is intensely selfish, of course. It's always looking out for what is best for self. But the way of Christ is the exact opposite. The way of Christ is about seeking what is best for the other person. So if we are looking to resolve conflicts, we've just got to let selfishness go. We've got to consider the needs and the desires of the other person. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to cave in to every unreasonable request that the other person makes. But certainly if we're to resolve conflict in a healthy way, we need to treat the other person with respect and with compassion.

Speaker 1: [16:20](#) Fourthly, we learn from this passage in Ephesians 4 that if we want to resolve conflict, then we have to speak constructively and not destructively. This is absolutely crucial, of course. It's a quality that is, uh, often sadly lacking in the public discourse of our nation. Speaking words that build up rather than tear down is crucial for conflict resolution. Paul reminds us in verse 29, he says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen". And we know that words can wound so badly. We can never take back what we've said and so we need to use our words wisely. The word sarcasm comes from, uh, the Greek phrase that means 'to eat flesh'. And that is exactly how it feels to be on the end of sarcastic, destructive, unkind words, a calling of names, sarcasm, gossip, threatening words, words of revenge, slander and lies.

Speaker 1: [17:48](#) These modes of speech can destroy lives both emotionally and physically, particularly in this age of social media. And we've seen so many young people taking their own lives because of what has been written or said about them on social media sites. Uh, these social media attacks are increasingly now reported in the media. But just as damaging is the gossip and the destructive speech that can happen over a cup of tea with a small group of friends. And we absolutely have to call out such behaviour, um, and we cannot allow it in any Christian community. Instead, as Paul urges us here, he says, "Speak only what is helpful for building others up." And I think that if there is anything that should, um, mark out the Christian community in this period of our national and even international history, it must be our readiness to use encouraging words and to thoroughly reject destructive discourse. The world can be such an unkind place and words are used so negatively and so destructively across society that if the church wants to truly offer a countercultural way of being, a countercultural way of living, that reflects the values of Jesus Christ, then there is probably no better place to start than through the words that we use to one another and the way in which we, um, speak to one another in order to encourage and build up rather than to put down and destroy.

Speaker 1: [20:15](#) And finally, if we want to resolve conflict, then we must show kindness and forgiveness, as Paul says in verse 32 of Ephesians 4: "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave you." Kindness is so, so important, and how we long to live in a kind world, how desperate we are to see a surge in kindness in society. Uh, I was speaking with somebody fairly recently and they said the same

phrase that we hear so often. They said, "respect needs to be earned." And I thought to myself, that is exactly the problem with the world in which we live. Because it seems that the default position for relationship now is one of disrespect. I will disrespect you until you have earned my respect. Now, wouldn't it be a more beautiful world if mutual respect were the default position? And actually, it was disrespect that needed to be earned.

Speaker 1: [21:33](#)

How much better to go into relationships with the attitude of committing to respect the other person, unless their behaviour eventually leads to a change of opinion. Respect does not need to be earned. Respect should be given as a default position and only disrespect needs to be earned. And at the heart of that is kindness and compassion to other people. And if we approach conflict in that manner, how much more easily our conflicts would be resolved. So in closing then, I'd say that conflict is not always a bad thing. It's part of the natural order of things. It leads to growth and it leads to development. And conflict, in one way, is to be embraced for its potential. But conflict that is ego based and self centered must be overcome and resolved. And we cannot resolve conflict just by pitting our ego against someone else's ego.

Speaker 1: [22:44](#)

We need a more spiritually mature approach than that. We must speak truth when it's helpful to do so. We must express our anger appropriately. We must develop a generous spirit. We must speak constructive words to one another. We must show kindness and forgiveness. And I think in these ways we will be, um, reflecting the spirit of Christ rather than an egotistical state of being. And that of course is the life to which we are called as Christians. So embrace conflict when it's appropriate, and resolve conflict through wise choices and wise behaviour when you need to. But in all things, let's make sure that we mirror the spirit of Christ in all of our relationships.

Speaker 1: [23:57](#)

So thanks for listening to this podcast today. I hope that you found it interesting and it's giving you something to think and to pray about. If you've got any feedback, then please do contact me by email steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org. Check out the church website standrewsenfield.com. Our Facebook page is St. Andrew's Enfield. Please do subscribe to these podcasts and share them with other people who you think might be interested in them and we'll continue to build our learning community together. So whatever you're doing today, I hope you have a wonderful day and I look forward to being with you again, uh, for our next podcast episode in the near future. Have a good day. Bye.

