

# Peacefakers, Peacebreakers, and Peacemakers

## Pt. 3, Conflict Starts in the Heart

### **Introduction**

Think of a person whom you have observed dealing with conflict in a Christlike way. This conflict may have occurred recently or years ago. Describe what impressed you about how the person acted in the midst of the conflict.

**\*How would you define what an idol is?**

*“An idol is a good thing that turns into an ultimate thing.”*

– Tim Keller

*“It’s preeminent, prominent, the center of your life, gives you identity, meaning, value, purpose, love, significance, security. When the Bible uses the word ‘idol’, that’s what it’s getting at.”*

– Mark Driscoll

**\*What are some ways you’ve noticed good things become ultimate things in your life?**

**\*How does it happen?**

**\*In what ways have those things contributed to conflicts?**

### **The Progression of an Idol**

Definition: An idol is anything apart from God that controls us and that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure (*see Luke 12:29; James 4:1-3*)

#### ***1. I Desire***

Conflict always begins with some kind of desire. Some desires are inherently wrong (vengeance, lust, greed, etc.), but others are not (a loving spouse, a new computer, a growing church, job success, etc.).

If someone stands in the way of a good desire, you can talk together and work out an agreement. If they persistently fail to meet your desires, you can trust God and seek your fulfillment in him, loving that person and asking God to open doors in his good timing.

OR... you fight for your desires, and they control you. This can destroy important relationships and draw you away from God.

**\*What does it look like for you personally to fight for your desires?**

**\*How does this manifest itself in conflict with others?**

#### ***2. I Demand***

The next step is to begin seeing unmet desires as something we deserve and therefore must have in order to be happy.

We tell ourselves:

- “I work diligently all week. I deserve peace and quiet when I get home.”
- “I spend hours managing our budget. A new computer could save me hours of work.”
- “I’ve worked longer than anyone on this project. I deserve a promotion.”

When we see something as essential to our fulfillment, “I wish I could have this” evolves into “I must have this.” Then, it becomes an idol.

### **3. I Judge**

When others fail to satisfy our desires, we criticize and condemn them in our hearts, if not with our words. In this, we imitate the Devil.

“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.” – *James 3:14-15*

Although scripture tells us we must evaluate others in order to respond in appropriate ways (which may involve loving confrontation, see Gal. 6:1), we cross the line when we judge others.

**\*At what point does your evaluation cross the line into judgement?**

Usually, you can identify when you’ve crossed the line into sinful judgement because it will be accompanied by feelings of (1) superiority, (2) indignation, (3) bitterness, or (4) resentment.

The closer you are to someone, the more likely we are to judge them when they fail to meet our expectations. E.g., You may feel or say to your spouse, “If you really loved me, you, above all people, would meet my need.”

Instead of giving people room to disagree or to fail, we rigidly impose our expectations on them. When they refuse to comply, our conflicts with them intensify.

### **4. I Punish**

Whether deliberately or unconsciously, we find ways to punish people so that they give into our desires.

**\*What are some ways we punish others to get what we desire?**

Here are a few ways we punish people when things don’t go our way:

- 1) Lash out with hurtful words
- 2) Pout, sulk, or look gloomy
- 3) Physical or sexual abuse
- 4) Refuse to make eye contact
- 5) Send subtle, unpleasant cues over time
- 6) Abandon the relationship

In groups, use these X-ray questions to identify which of your desires may have become idols. Discuss each question and share how you might answer.

- a. What preoccupies me? What is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing on my mind at night?
- b. How would you complete this sentence? “If only \_\_\_\_\_, I would be happy, fulfilled, and secure.”
- c. What is something I want so much that I would disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?
- d. When a certain desire is not met, do I feel frustration, anxiety, resentment, bitterness, anger, depression?

**\*Which question was most helpful to you?**

**\*For those who don't mind sharing, which of your desires may have become idols?**

### **The Cure for an Idolatrous Heart**

God, through Christ, delivers us from his judgement.

God not only delivers us from our general problem of sin, but he delivers us from specific, day-to-day idols that consume and control us. He calls on us to identify and repent of our idols one by one. He then removes them from our heart bit by bit. God does this in three ways.

- 1) ***He uses scripture*** to spotlight and shine his Word of truth into our hearts. This reveals our idolatrous desires and shows how to love God with all that we are.
- 2) ***The Spirit convicts and enables us*** to put our sin to death and grow in godliness.
- 3) He works in and through the Church, where Christian brothers and sisters can teach you, encourage you, hold you accountable for your idols, and God ministers to you through the preaching of his Word.

Describe a time when a godly person helped you see that a good desire had grown into a controlling idol and was taking first place in your life.

What are some specific ways we could pray for each other to help guard our hearts against desires that grow into demands and cause conflict? Let's pray together.