

Sermon Notes: Conflict in the Early Church (Acts 15-19)

Introduction

- **Series Continuation**: Continuing the series on the book of Acts, focusing on chapters 15-19.
- **Encouragement to Read**: Encourages the congregation to read Acts 15-19 during the week for a deeper understanding.
- **Main Focus**: Highlighting conflicts in the early church and their relevance to today's society.

Types of Conflict

1. **Theological Conflict**:

- **Example**: Acts 15:1-20 discusses the debate over circumcision and the law of Moses for Gentile believers.
- **Key Point**: Salvation is by faith in Christ alone, not by works or adherence to the law of Moses. [\[01:55\]](#)

2. **Relational Conflict**:

- **Example**: Personal conflicts within the church, similar to conflicts in marriage or friendships.
- **Key Point**: Christians are not immune to conflict; we must manage expectations and understand that everyone is broken and trying their best. [\[03:44\]](#)

3. **Worldly Conflict**:

- **Example**: Acts 16:16-33 shows the world coming into conflict with the church.
- **Key Point**: The church cannot fully align with the world because the world is influenced by the enemy. Christians must choose to be fully in God's camp. [\[05:44\]](#)

Theological Conflict in Detail

- **Scripture Reading**: Acts 15:1-20.
- **Debate**: Some men from Judea insisted on circumcision for salvation, which Paul and Barnabas opposed.
- **Resolution**: Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to resolve the issue, showing accountability and the importance of structured debate. [\[07:24\]](#)

Accountability and Discussion

- **Paul's Accountability**: Paul felt accountable to the church in Jerusalem and chose to resolve the debate there.
- **Structured Debate**: The church allowed open discussion without silencing opposing views, leading to a resolution guided by the Holy Spirit. [\[11:03\]](#)

Tests for Theological Truth

1. **Scriptural Confirmation**: Does Jesus or the Bible say it?
2. **Community Confirmation**: Are other believers confirming it?
3. **Spiritual Signs**: Are there spiritual signs supporting it? [\[18:57\]](#)

Handling Theological Conflict

- **Primary vs. Secondary Issues**: Focus on primary issues like salvation and the gospel. Secondary issues should not cause division.
- **Example**: Creation debate (literal six-day creation vs. long periods) is a secondary issue. [\[24:58\]](#)

Living in Harmony

- **Scripture**: Romans 12:16-18, Ephesians 4:1-3.
- **Key Point**: Live peaceably with all, be humble, gentle, and patient. Maintain unity in the Spirit. [\[32:52\]](#)

Correcting with Gentleness

- **Scripture**: 2 Timothy 2:22-25.
- **Key Point**: Correct opponents with gentleness. God's kindness leads to repentance, not aggression. [\[38:51\]](#)

Love as a Mark of Discipleship

- **Scripture**: John 13:35.
- **Key Point**: Love one another as a mark of being Jesus' disciples. Flavor every discussion with love and gentleness. [\[40:54\]](#)

Conclusion

- **Unity in the Church**: Despite differences, agree on the core truth that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.
- **Prayer**: For a heart like Jesus to handle conflicts in a way that honors God and points to Him. [\[46:44\]](#)

Final Prayer

- **Focus**: Asking for God's help to love, be kind, and gentle, recognizing everyone as an image bearer of God. [\[46:44\]](#)

Summary

Today, we delved into the conflicts faced by the early church as recorded in Acts chapters 15 to 19. We explored three types of conflicts: theological, relational, and worldly. Theological conflicts often arise from differing interpretations of scripture, as seen in Acts 15 where some believers insisted on circumcision for salvation. Paul and Barnabas opposed this, emphasizing that salvation is through faith in Christ alone. They returned to Jerusalem to resolve this issue, demonstrating the importance of accountability and collective discernment in theological matters.

Relational conflicts are inevitable in any community, including the church. We must remember that we are all broken and striving to follow God's way. The early church faced relational conflicts but worked through them with grace and understanding. Worldly conflicts occur when the values of the church clash with those of the world. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve both God and the world; we must choose to stand firmly in God's camp.

The early church's approach to conflict resolution offers valuable lessons for us today. They engaged in open, respectful discussions, allowing all voices to be heard before reaching a consensus. They tested their beliefs against scripture, sought confirmation from others, and

looked for spiritual signs. This structured approach ensured that their decisions were aligned with God's will.

We are called to live in harmony, be humble, and maintain unity within the church. While we may have differing opinions on secondary issues, we must stand united on the core truths of the gospel. Our witness to the world depends on our ability to love one another and handle conflicts with kindness and gentleness. By following the example of the early church, we can navigate conflicts in a way that honors God and strengthens our community.

Key Takeaways

1. **Theological Conflicts and Accountability**: The early church faced significant theological conflicts, such as the debate over circumcision for salvation. Paul and Barnabas demonstrated the importance of accountability by returning to Jerusalem to resolve the issue collectively. This teaches us that theological disputes should be addressed within the community, with a focus on scripture and collective discernment. [\[11:03\]](#)
2. **Relational Conflicts in the Church**: Relational conflicts are inevitable, even within the church. We must remember that we are all broken and striving to follow God's way. The early church worked through relational conflicts with grace and understanding, setting an example for us to handle disagreements with love and patience. [\[01:55\]](#)
3. **Worldly Conflicts and Standing Firm**: The church often faces conflicts with worldly values. Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve both God and the world. We must choose to stand firmly in God's camp, even when it leads to conflict with societal norms. This requires courage and a steadfast commitment to God's principles. [\[03:44\]](#)
4. **Structured Conflict Resolution**: The early church's approach to conflict resolution involved open, respectful discussions, testing beliefs against scripture, seeking confirmation from others, and looking for spiritual signs. This structured approach ensured that their decisions were aligned with God's will and provides a model for us to follow in resolving conflicts today. [\[20:54\]](#)
5. **Unity and Love in the Church**: We are called to live in harmony, be humble, and maintain unity within the church. While we may have differing opinions on secondary issues, we must stand united on the core truths of the gospel. Our witness to the world depends on our ability to love one another and handle conflicts with kindness and gentleness. [\[34:48\]](#)