

Bible Studies for Life Series for May13: Accept responsibility for actions

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Accept responsibility for actions

- Matthew 7:1-5; James 4:1-3,6-12

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Conflict litters the landscape of our lives. We all seem to face conflict in some form or fashion each day, yet few of us seem to know how to deal with conflict appropriately.

Conflict can come in a simple anonymous form of a telemarketer's call. You know the scenario. You realize the lady on the other end of the line is just doing her job. She is just so persistent—and annoying. And the calls always seem to interrupt family time at the dinner table.

In recent years, we are hearing more and more about “road rage.” A driver gets angry at another driver; before you know it, tempers flare and full conflict has engulfed a number of people.



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How do we properly respond to situations when conflict arises? Can we learn our role as Christ-followers to accept responsibility in light of God's word for our part in a conflict? Will confession follow our wrongs with a commitment to change sinful attitudes and actions?

One of the most helpful resources in learning to deal properly with conflict comes from Peacemaker Ministries. They offer what is called the 7 A's of Confession:

As God opens your eyes to see how you have sinned against others, he simultaneously offers you a way to find freedom from your past wrongs. It is called confession.

Many people have never experienced this freedom because they have never learned how to confess their wrongs honestly and unconditionally. Instead, they use words like these: "I'm sorry if I hurt you." "Let's just forget the past." "I suppose I could have done a better job." "I guess it's not all your fault."

These token statements rarely trigger genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. If you really want to make peace, ask God to help you breathe grace by humbly and thoroughly admitting your wrongs. One way to do this is to use the Seven A's:

- Address everyone involved (all those whom you affected);

- Avoid if, but, and maybe (do not try to excuse your wrongs);
- Admit specifically (both attitudes and actions);
- Acknowledge the hurt (express sorrow for hurting someone);
- Accept the consequences (such as making restitution);
- Alter your behavior (change your attitudes and actions);
- Ask for forgiveness.

(See Matthew 7:3-5; 1 John 1:8-9; Proverbs 28:13)

Evaluate yourself (Matthew 7:1-5)

Our text begins with the command of Jesus “Judge not!” (Matthew 7:5).

The word “judge” can mean to evaluate or analyze. Jesus calls us to move out of the critic’s corner and become more compassionate and caring in our dealings with one another. Jesus becomes the master painter in these verses—creating for all of us a word picture, or visual, to show an extreme situation of judging someone else. One person has a log in his eye and yet he sees, notices and gazes upon his brother who has the smallest speck in his eye.

Before we blame or criticize others, we are to evaluate ourselves and accept responsibility for our part in any conflict. When we have been humbled by the reality of our own sins, we will be able to approach our brother about his sins in humility and gentleness.

Recognize conflict’s source (James 4:1-3)

James opens his teaching with an interrogation. He begins with a first question, “What causes quarrels and fights among you?” (James 4:1). The word “fight” here refers to a battle with weapons, an armed conflict. It is used figuratively to indicate our struggles are spiritual and intensely personal. James identifies our problem of conflicts—selfishness and envy come as a result of our out-of-control desires for worldly pleasures.

We lose all our desire to please and glorify God when we seek to please and gratify ourselves. James points to man’s wisdom versus God’s wisdom.

Unfortunately, conflict even pours into the church. When men and women begin to seek their own way and their own will rather than praying together and seeking the Lord’s will together, conflict can lead to a fractured fellowship. What if the pastor sought the forgiveness of others and confessed his sins? What if those in the church family accepted responsibility and confessed and sought reconciliation?

Submit to God (James 4:6-12)

Our lesson concludes with James using no less than 10 imperatives (commands) in four verses (vv. 7-10). James warned that Christians who speak evil against each other set themselves up as judges and assume a position belonging only to God.

In contrast to a self-sufficient and self-reliant lifestyle, the believer is called to follow in the steps of our servant-leader, Jesus Christ.

The believer must be willing to submit to God’s way. When we repent of worldly desires, motives and actions, God's wisdom will produce peace among his people. We no longer will rationalize our own sinful desires and actions. The world’s standards no longer will be our measurement for success. When we humbly submit to God, he will lift us up. We will evaluate

our part in any conflict in the light of God's word and discover his peace that brings resolution to all conflicts.

Discussion questions

- What are some ways Christians judge others?
- How can we "submit" to God?
- How do we seek worldly wisdom over God's wisdom?
- What role does prayer play in peacekeeping?
- What should be a Christian's proper relationship with "the world"?