

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

GOD'S GLORY IN CONFLICT PAPER

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## Introduction

Conflict is inevitable. Poirier characterizes conflict as follows: “It never clocks in at 9:00 a.m. and leaves at 5:00 p.m. or knocks on the door of our study to ask if this is an appropriate time to talk. And conflict never comes with a fixed agenda.”<sup>1</sup> Before attempting to show association between conflict and God’s glory; it is crucial to note some notable characterizations of God. First, God is a Triune God; meaning interrelation between Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed from eternity. Second, God is a God of true peace. Most importantly, for the sake of this paper, is that God is a relational God. So then how is conflict to be associated with God? According to Poirier, God has actually ordained conflict and conflict is not a condition that follows disorder; no, conflict is preceded by creation and therefore conflict is preceded by a God of peace (Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20).<sup>2</sup> Taking these thoughts into account a logical conclusion is that conflict is included within God’s absolute and sovereign plan (Rom. 11:36). Poirier explains that most people see conflict from a “horizontal dimension in life” rather than a “Godward [vertical] dimension.”<sup>3</sup>

## Philippians Chapter Four

It is in the Pauline Epistle of Philippians this Godward dimension of conflict can be clearly seen as having the beneficial rewards of contentment for the Apostle Paul. Moreover the conflict Paul is experiencing provides opportunity for increased spiritual fruit for the Christian believers of Philippi (Phil. 4:11-20). In Philippians 4:12 Paul gives sets of contrasting life experiences that

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Poirier. *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Poirier. *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

existed in his life: abased and abounding; full and hungry; abounding and suffering need.”<sup>4</sup>

Why; because ultimately these diverse experiences end up giving glory to the God in whom Paul served. In Philippians 4:13 Paul explains, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” It is through the strength of God in which Paul is able to joyfully endure the sufferings and conflicts that Roman imprisonment presented.

### **Supporting Biblical References**

In his book, *The Peacemaking Pastor*, Poirier refers to “conflict” as a “*pure joy*” when making reference to a biblical phrase found in James (James 1:2-3).<sup>5</sup> That is a joy rooted and nourished by conflict. This idea has similarities to the circumstance the Apostle Paul is promoting in Philippians chapter four. It is through the circumstances of Paul’s life that he was able to glory in God, even in the conflicts. Why; because the net result of such God ordained conflicts lead Paul towards a maturing, or complete, faith. In 2 Corinthians 12:15, Paul states, “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.” This is conflict with contentment! This mirrors the example Christ left for His followers. Jesus was spent for sinners, and the more He loved the more He was hated. Spurgeon gives a vivid illustrative picture regarding the necessity for stimulating and growth promoting conflicts:

Those old gnarlings on the root of the oak tree, and those strange twistings of the branches, all tell of the many storms that have swept over it, and they also are indicators of the depth into which the roots have forced their way. So the Christian is made strong, and firmly rooted by all the trials and storms of life.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All Scripture is from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Poirier. *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon. *ewordtoday.com. Spurgeon’s Morning by Morning: July 11.*  
<http://www.ewordtoday.com/spurgeon/0711am.htm>. Accessed June 27, 2013.

In the Book of James, there are added components to trials [conflicts]. In James 1:3 there is the added component of “patience” (vs. 3). Continuing in verse 4, James adds the additional component of faiths “perfect work.” James continues in verse 4, that “ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing”; or as Paul mentioned in Philippians chapter four, satisfied and content. So here we see a thread of thought that is shared by both; the Apostle Paul and the Apostle James. Conflict has a primary place in God’s sovereign agenda and as both apostles (Paul and James) have shown; one of the primary benefits of conflict is that it leads to a vertical joyful contentment that buds into a mature and strengthened faith in God.

Another reason for conflict is to provide a measurement gauge for sincerity. Ogilvie defines the word used for trials, in James 1:3, as being “from the Greek *peirasmós*” with the root meaning ‘to assay, to examine, or to put to the proof.’”<sup>7</sup> This conveys the idea of experiencing trials and conflict as a method of proving a subjects level of genuine authenticity.

A third biblical passage with linking characteristics to the text of Philippians chapter four is Hebrews 12:7-14. In this portion of Scripture the writer of Hebrews is dealing with the subject of fatherly discipline. Similarly, conflict can serve as God’s mechanism for providing a healthy and nurturing dose of “Heavenly Father Discipline” towards His children. God utilizes conflicts as an opportunity to provide teachable moments and to advance developmental forms of discipline. Poirier adds, “Rather than spurning hardship, he urges us to endure it as *God’s fatherly discipline*. As such, he calls us to embrace an attitude of learning and rejoicing in the midst of our sufferings, hardships, and conflict.”<sup>8</sup> The writer of Hebrews cautions the readers; if there is no “chastisement” it is because they are “bastards and not sons” (Heb. 12:8). The

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<sup>7</sup> Lloyd J. Ogilvie, ed. *The Preachers Commentary: James 1*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982-1992. e-Sword, Version 10.0.5.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred Poirier. *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*, 77.

interrelation found between Hebrews chapter twelve and Philippians chapter four, centers on the theme of contentment during conflict; for the purposes of strength, teaching, and discipline.

These outcomes are beneficial to the believer and frequently are an end result of conflict. Lastly, it must be stressed, according to Hebrews 12:11, fatherly discipline will yield “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”

Interestingly, in Philippians 4:17 we find a similar Pauline reference to fruit, “Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.” In context, the Apostle Paul is referring to a gift given by the Philippian Church, during Paul’s imprisonment period. Paul is saying he is content; yet, also thankful for the gift from the Philippians. Paul added, it was not so much that he desired a gift; but, that they may have opportunity to obtain fruitful rewards from the Heavenly Father for their generosity. Had Paul not been in his current demise, the Philippians would not have been given this unique opportunity to meet the Apostle Paul’s need; yet, to the glory of God the Philippian Church was able to add fruit to their spiritual account!

Returning back to the main focus of conflict and the glory of God, Poirier lists other additional earmarks that are resultant from conflict. These earmarks include: mercy, justice, peace, righteousness, and reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> There have been numerous conflicts in this student’s life where a conflict would bear one of the aforementioned fruitful earmarks. Conflict at its very base level of spirituality, provides a foundational format in which lost sinner’s can come to know Jesus Christ as Savior; and, experience God’s mercy, peace, and reconciliation.

The Apostle Paul continues in Philippians 4:18, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things *which were sent* from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” Here, Paul considers the gift of the Philippian believers as a “sacrifice” that is “wellpleasing to God.” Again, it is the current circumstances of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 78, 81, 84.

Paul's conflict that enable the Philippians believers to become a sweet aroma before the throne of God. All of these references: of "peaceable fruits," Christ strengthening us, and being "wellpleasing to God," show the relational aspects between God and humanity.

### **Conclusion**

Though we live in a fallen world and many times conflict is in fact the result of sin; yet, a Sovereign God has allowed it for a purposeful reason that often is not readily understood. Poirier states, with regards to conflict, "It tests us and sifts our hearts, revealing what we truly believe and hold fast to. If we truly confess and believe that God ordains conflict instead of cursing it, we can consecrate it."<sup>10</sup> Poirier continues, "Most important rather than perceiving conflict as an obstacle to our ministry, we can welcome it as an opportunity to minister."<sup>11</sup>

Conflict is divinely appointed to be a part of every Christian's life. Jonah had conflict with God because he didn't care for the Nineveh people. Still God utilized conflict to change and transform Jonah's heart.<sup>12</sup> The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, had conflict with the three Hebrew youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow before an idolatrous image. The conflict was so sharp that the king had them thrown into the oven; yet, God used this incident that He might receive glory through it.<sup>13</sup> It is through countless biblical accounts such as these that God's divine interventions and ultimate purpose can be clearly seen, even in conflicts.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> This account is found in The Book of Jonah, Chapters 1-4.

<sup>13</sup> This account is found in The Book of Daniel, Chapter 3.

## Bibliography

Poirier, Alfred. *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006.

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