
Talking your Way out of Conflict

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Here is a roadmap to help yourself and your church, though the Biblical process of solving problems!

As a pastor, I sometimes get involved with every kind of conflict imaginable, from business disputes, personality clashes, monetary discord, land rights, probate, parent teacher issues, and of course, the most common, marital. I leaned over the years, not so much from my degrees in psychology but, rather, my pastoral experience, how to talk my way out of problems. Being a person who hates conflict, I seek the easiest, most efficient way to put it down. I had to, for the sake of my survival and sanity, figure a way to focus others on the relationship more than the issue. This worked great for many years in pastoral ministry until I came across domestic violence. These other issues were not life threatening, until I came up against people in enraged situations trying to literally kill one another.

For some strange reason, a person who hates conflict (me) had the opportunity to be a Chaplain for a Southern California Police Department for a couple years. My role was to ride along with and minister to the officers, and accompany them to the most dangerous police call there is—not bank robbery or dragnets—domestic violence. I spent a significant amount of time in training for this, and as a *man of the cloth*, so to speak, enraged, fighting couples were more agreeable to settle down without violence in my presence than for a uniformed officer. I had to learn fast—as my life and the officer’s life depended on it—how to dissolve violent situations. These precepts, along with my pastoral training and experience, can be of help to you, too.

This is not the avoiding of problems, although I have been known to do that, but by carefully listening and coming to a solution to appease the person, the situation can be calmed down so the facts can be evaluated. Then, the concentration can be focused on the building of the relationship. Otherwise, the problem will continue and the relationships will suffer. The most important thing I had to learn is to not take problems at face value so that they overwhelmed me. I had to see the big picture—that God was still sovereign, and this, like any storm, would eventually pass and be forgotten.

Most problems seem complex; intertwined with so many people and so much hurt and communication ills, it seems overwhelming and hopeless. But, that is not the case; most problems have just a few simple components to them that can be isolated and dealt with. Even when I arrived on the scene with a man chasing his girlfriend with a knife, I was able to resolve the issue without shooting

him. Of course you should never engage in a violent situation without significant training and someone at your side who is armed. But, you can resolve many issues in your life and the lives of others with a few simple hints. If you are not the one to do this, it is OK; most pastors should not; they should refer people with problems that they cannot handle to a good counselor or lawyer. And, with violence or potential violence, always, always call the police; do not take a chance. It is better to have a false arrest than a dead body!

Here is a roadmap to help yourself, your church, or a moderator through the Biblical process of understanding and solving problems. This can be easily applied to church conflicts, business disputes, and marital (Proverbs 3:4-6; 18:13; Matthew 15:18-19; 18: 15-20; Luke 19:1-9; 1 John 14:15; Romans 8:28-29; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 10:31-11:1; Ephesians 4:22-32; 5:1; Philippians 4:2-9; James 4:1-3):

Essential Points to Remember:

1. **You are Christ's loved one** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10): Do not take the problem as a personal attack, even if it is. You may be a part of the conflict, or a third party trying to resolve it. You are Christ's child; He is your identity and defense! When you understand that, you can better see your role as a relationship builder—even when the other person is seeking to tear you down. This first point has saved me a lot of stress and disappointment!
2. **Conflict is an Opportunity** (1 Corinthians 6:1-8): It is an opportunity to learn and give God honor. It is not necessarily bad or the end of a relationship. Know for certain that God can use conflict, whether it is sin, bad choices, a wrong turn, or a misunderstanding, and transform it into good if you let Him. God will be glorified, and you will grow in character, maturity, trust, love, obedience, and in faith.
3. **Listening** (Proverbs 28:13; James 1:19-25; 1 John 1:8-9): The first job is listening, without opening your mouth. Effective listening and getting each party to listen is essential! Until each one listens, nothing productive will happen. People need to be heard; the one who listens earns the right to be heard and resolve the issue. Make sure they know you are listening by giving eye contact, leaning forward, and being relaxed. Restate to clarify what you heard with as few words as possible, saying, *this is what I heard...* Be open and say, "I'm confused; let me try to restate what I think you said." Or, "You have said so much; let me see if I have heard it all."
4. **Understand Forgiveness** (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 3:12-14): Most Christians have a pale sense of the wonder that we have been forgiven, and often fail to show that forgiveness to others when wronged. Forgiveness is absolutely crucial for any relationship to continue, and critical to resolve any conflict! Remember how much you have been

forgiven; do not fail to show it to others! Remember, God does not treat us the way we tend to treat others.

5. **Communication** (Luke 15:11-24): Seeking understanding is more important than resolving the issue. Most issues do not need to be resolved if all parties can understand one another's situation. Get them to talk and listen, and you are on the road to recovery! *Why is the person hurt? Why do they feel that way? What do they want? What can be done?* How to do this:
 - a. Pray for wisdom and discernment! Keep praying, gather all of the facts, and get second opinions and godly council without revealing confidences.
 - b. Be positive, have a win-win attitude, smile, and look the person in the eyes. Affirm each person; make them feel comfortable. Let them know you care and want to hear them. Treat each person with utmost respect and kindness even if you feel they do not deserve it. Remember that they are God's child, too! Operate in the Fruits of the Spirit, not the works of the flesh!
 - c. Do not be afraid to give the moderation over to someone else if you cannot handle it. I have done this many times over the years, due to time, family, being out of my expertise, and personality clashes.
 - d. When you confront, ask yourself, *how would I want to be confronted?*
 - e. Be humble and introspective so you can understand how you, or (if you are the moderator) the participants have each contributed to the conflict (Proverbs 19:11).
 - f. Never compare your life and situations with that of others; God deals with everyone equally, yet differently. Think before you speak (Ephesians 4:29)!
 - g. Write stuff down!
 - h. Validate each person as important.
 - i. Use humor only when it is appropriate to diffuse a tense situation and never as an attack!
 - j. Identify each person's involved interests, concerns, desires, needs, limitations, and fears.
 - k. Allow all the parties equal time to tell their side without interruption; then get feedback from the others.
 - l. Do not be self-focused; focus on the issue, facts, feelings, and how this affects Christ's Kingdom and Fullness.
 - m. If you are a part of the conflict, speak for yourself—not for the other person! As a moderator, make a ground rule that each person can only speak for themselves and not reword or restate the other's view. That way, the finger pointing is stopped and listening can begin.
 - n. Attack the issue, not the people; allow no condemnations, commands, threats, condescending attitudes, name calling, or disrespect!
 - o. Commit to understand one another and each person's side, and to refrain from interrupting.
 - p. Phrase the problem as questions and not attacks! Phrases such as, *you feel* (state the feeling) or *because* (state the content) are appropriate.
 - q. Do not blame! Have each party state how the issue affects them, how they feel. For example, if a spouse is always gone and the other is angry about

that, state, "When you are gone I feel... (Lonely)," rather than "you are never home." This diffuses most arguments and refocuses the blame to how they feel. When each one is aware of the other's feelings, especially in marital conflict, problem solving can begin.

- r. Ask, *how is the problem dishonoring God? How is it hurting each person involved and how is it damaging the relationship?*
- s. Be open and willing to listen to all solutions no matter how ridiculous. Again, people need to be heard! This invites the willingness to cooperate and listen.
- t. If people refuse to talk to one another, have them write their complaint on one page with a general description, their side, what they think the other person did, and their solution. Then go over it, summarize it, and present it to both parties. Do not allow them to respond until it is fully read.
- u. When sin is involved, it must be confessed and dealt with. The person's attitude that promoted the sin needs to be addressed and confronted.
- v. Make sure you are listening and each person knows you are listening. If you are the moderator, you can restate each person's response. If it is a marriage situation with only the couple, restate your position in a positive way by saying, *this is what I heard...* When you summarize, do not add new ideas or your agenda!
- w. Keep to one issue at a time; do not allow other past conflicts to interrupt. When multi problems are raised, it becomes too frustrating and overwhelming to solve. Solve one, or at least come to an understanding, before going to the next one.
- x. Say, *what can we do to solve this problem together? What are the steps do you see that can resolve this issue?* If that does not work, place the issue on what the purpose of the Christian life is about, to worship and glorify Christ. *How can we develop a solution that glorifies our Lord?*
- y. If the parties or you cannot calm down, take a break; if that does not work, reschedule for another time.
- z. Start to work together by seeing each person on the same team and not opposing adversaries; we are all God's children, and in the same church family.

6. **Commit to a Positive Solution or Understanding** (James 4:1-12; Matthew 15:18-19): A lot of conflicts, especially marital, will continue as each person is constantly "pushing buttons;" they are on a merry-go-round without being merry. You have to make a decision that the pushing will stop, regardless of the hurt, for the sake of the relationship. Ask, "What can we both do differently to solve this problem so it does not continue?" Then resolution can begin. All parties must agree that the cycles of conflict must stop. Unless there is an agreement and a follow through, no resolution will take place. Sometimes, problems cannot be resolved, and that is OK if understanding can be sought. If the person refuses to stop escalating the problem, they are too steeped in pride, and this problem has to be referred to church elders and/or civil authorities. In the case of domestic violence, this is where I would "cuff and

stuff them” into the patrol car. In the church, this is where they are asked to leave the fellowship until they get right with God.

Break down the issue in steps and then come to a solution that all can agree upon.

- a. Gather all of the information you can. Write down the facts, feelings, possible outcomes if unresolved, and possible outcomes if resolved. Look for root issues; most problems are symptoms of deeper issues.
- b. Write down the description(s) of the problem.
- c. Write down what positive result each person would like to see.
- d. Evaluate and summarize each person’s statement so it describes the situation fairly.
- e. When you are dealing with substantive issues such as money, property, or human rights, you need to involve an attorney or professional in that field to help resolve the issue. If it is a theological issue, adhere to what is plainly taught in God’s Word and your church confessions. But, even here, the goal is to be cooperative, not competitive (Matthew 7:12; 22:39; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 2:3-4).
- f. Brainstorm possible solutions by thinking through ideas without critiquing them. Evaluate; do not argue! This is the *what are the possibilities* stage; you do not need to jump to a conclusion. Take your time.
- g. Look at all the ideas, and then ask, “How might we come to a mutual solution?” “How can we create a new and better future?” Remember, all are on the same team!
- h. If this is a conflict involving you, if there is no moderator, and if things are not going smooth, be humble; find a trusted, mutual friend, counselor, or pastor to moderate! Do not allow your pride to push others away and destroy relationships!
- i. Now evaluate the ideas one by one. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the ideas? Which ones are acceptable to all parties? Which one glorifies our Lord the most? Remember to keep it positive; not everyone will be happy.
- j. Create a schedule to implement the best possible solution.
- k. Remember, when people are uncooperative, only God can change them and they need to have the willingness to allow Him to do so (Romans 12:18; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).
- l. If you failed to come to an understanding, take this to heart—as long as you are obedient to Him, you did not fail; you succeeded immeasurably! Some situations cannot be resolved, simply because of pride.
- m. Once an agreement is reached, commit to the fact that this incident does not need to be brought up again, especially in marriage. *I will not complain about it, I will not dwell on it, I will not gossip about it; I will*

not use it against the other person. I will forgive and forget and move ahead in building our relationship! If not, it will just start all over again!

Dealing with difficult people (1 Peter 2:19)

A lot of people are unreasonable—even Christians. We will run into people who will just not get it, listen, deal, resolve or handle things God's way. They only want their way or the highway. Some people have hard hearts and are unwilling or unable, due to personality defects or chemical imbalances, to see others as God's child too. They only see it for themselves. This is very sad and there is not much you can do with them. They are the ones who will be lonely and bitter because that is what they want. We are still called to pray and minister to them, but it is best not to take their attacks personally.

We have to remember; we all are difficult at times and we all have sinned and fallen way short of God standards. That is what the cross is about (Isaiah 59:1–2; Matthew 5:48; Rom. 3:23; 6:23)! That is why it is so important to prepare yourself spiritually and keep your focus on God—not people or situations—so His fruit can work in you.

Prayer is the most important act for us in any manner. Also, remember, your obedience is what is important, not how others respond to you. We are even called to bless these unreasonable people, and we do that by remaining true to His Lordship in our maturity (Luke 6:27-31; Ephesians 4:29). You cannot be responsible for how others respond and treat you when you are acting in godly character (Romans 12:14-21). Do not let the situation or the bad people get you down, or cause you to compromise Biblical precepts or your character! Never close the Bible or prayer; your spiritual journey and your trust and growth in Him will be your anchor to weather the storms. Do not allow yourself to suffer in your spiritual pilgrimage because of someone else. You are still God's special child (Colossians 3:1-4)! Do not let yourself fall to the world's way, regardless of what the other person does (1 Peter 2:12 -19; 3:15b-16). Give them over to God; He is the one who dispenses justice and revenge, not you (Hebrews 12:6)!

These are the times you need to especially control your tongue and attitude. Focus on the Lord, not the situation. Do not allow yourself to get into a pity party so it is all about you; it is not; it is all about Him. You may not be able to do anything to resolve the relationship, but that does not mean you are to give up—especially in marriage. Your purpose is to take the focus off yourself and onto Christ as Lord. That way, bitterness and resentment you got from others will not become a virus that affects you! Repentance and reconciliation may still come. Remember His timing; I have seen miracles of reconciliation long after I had given up hope. God is still at work, even when we do not see Him. God may use your character to speak to them down the road; no relationship or attempt at reconciliation is ever wasted in His Kingdom (Psalm 10; 37; 1 Samuel 24:1-22)!

Preventing Conflict

Most of the conflict we experience in life comes from our selfish desires, our insistence on our own way, over and against others. So, we are posed to pounce on each other to get our way, while our Lord looks sadly at our pettiness and calls us to walk above it. But, do we listen? Desiring something is not necessarily wrong, but when we do not trust our Lord for it, then we have a problem. The Bible calls us to come before a Holy God by what Christ has done and resulting from a fountain of “Living Water” which is our Lord. We are to rely on Him and not on our inclinations. When we do the latter, conflict is sure to erupt. When we walk in faith and realize our position before our Lord Jesus Christ, then we will bypass our self-will and yield to His.

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

We need to realize how evil we are when we fight with each other because of our personal agendas and desires! It is God alone who provides us the “Living Waters.” So, why do we persist in digging our own wells, only to bring up dirt that is useless and worthless?

“Jesus answered her, if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

We can earn nothing on our own, and centrally, our salvation is a gift from God, so our behaviors with one another must reflect this undeserved, free gift. The *free* does not mean we can engage in war with one another, rather, to pursue peace and love.

So, what do we do? How can we restrain our desires to manipulate, control, and to be aggressive, instead of repairing relationships? Simply by realizing whom we are before a Holy God and our undeserving gift! Primary conflict is in us, so we need to control the sin that encroaches us, something Cain failed to do. We must discern between what we desire and what is provided to us. We need to discern between our goals and what the will of the Lord is. We need to discern between what we want and what God wants! Then, the conflicts and diseases of distraction that lead to relationship destruction will cease! Our Lord has already won the ultimate conflict of good vs. evil, of rebellion vs. sovereignty.

Remember, love covers a multitude of sins; so what shall we do? LOVE! Love with the love that Christ had for us when we did not deserve it, and with the response of the love we should have for each other. Jesus let go of His place with the Father—something that we can not conceive. He gave up a precious

position for the mission of redeeming us. If we pursued the model that Christ laid before us, how much conflict would we have? Practically none! How could we fight with one another when we are focused on our Lord and the interests of others? How can we carry on conflicts with one another when we take a deep, introspective look into our desires and compare them to the Scriptures? Our focus must not be in our self-awareness, but on what Christ has done as a template for our behaviors and actions! By being a true example of our Lord, we will neutralize most conflicts. When self-desires are focused on our Lord, intrapersonal conflict will be dissolved; so, there will be no conflict with self-desires. Interpersonal conflict will cease because we will be a community of Believers on the “same page,” especially because we have the interests of others in mind and are willing to follow the Biblical precepts to solving conflict. So, we are left with substantive conflicts between beliefs. When we are a community of Believers with a high view of the Scriptures, then we will eliminate most of them. So, the conflicts will be between Believers and aberrant and cult groups, and the minor theological distinctions can be on an “agree to disagree” venue. This may sound utopian and unattainable, but this is Christian community in its true, called action!

Problems do not have to ruin your life. They do not need to take you over or skew the purpose and direction of your call or your church. We all have the power to make the determination that we will not let the trivialities of life derail us from who we are in Christ and His purpose for us. Most conflict is trivial, but we are never to approach it as trivial. It is to be taken seriously so it can be resolved and the more important things in life can be pursued. Use this process to also learn more about the other person and yourself. Learn how to be better in your character and maturity and your relationship with God. See challenges as opportunities to learn and grow in His presence and His Fruit.

By following a few simple ideas from the precepts of His Word, we can save ourselves a lot of pain and hurt and drastically improve our relationships. Just by understanding the other person, you will do wonders for relationships and your church! The focus is what we talked about in the first chapter with Fullness and the Kingdom of God. The relationship is the priority, not the material goods or desires that may come up. When we are operating our lives in God’s parameters, we are glorifying Him, building His Kingdom, and living in Fullness. When we are steeped in our pride, we are destroying our relationships and bringing shame to His Church. Why would we want to do that and take on all of the bitterness, resentment, hurt, and frustration in life, when we can have so much better?

Remember this very important fact; unresolved conflict costs much more than the cost to resolve it. In fact, to not manage conflict will enormously cost your relationships and church. It will cost you money, time, lost productivity, shattered relationships, lost children, dissolved marriages, bad decisions—and it can literally kill and destroy you and all that you know. It could have been turned

around, but nobody wanted to bother with it! Do not let this happen to you, your friends, your family, or your church!

Going Deeper:

Averting Conflict

“Cultivating a Biblical Solution”

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,” (Philippians 2:3-6)

A church will just be going about its business, then suddenly wham! People are arming themselves for battle, choosing sides and indulging in their pride. Personalities and self-determination takes control of the situation and seeks its own over sound reasoning, the truth, and call of our Lord. So arguments of persuasion with the skewing of truth produce self-directed outcomes, which comes against the peaceful church. And its peace is no longer, full-blown war has broken out. It can start with one gossip and escalate where emotions rise and logic ceases. Do we dare tread to calm these waters? Maybe with the right attitude and guidance from God's Word, we can give a win/win outcome that is best for all people involved. Then we can create a church free of conflict, when we are focused on the mission and the purpose of being a Christian and being a Christ-filled church.

There are conflicts with various views of moral and value stands today that would have been unheard of in years past. The leadership of the church must be prepared to deal with people not having values and focus in their lives. People not having moral centers and absolutes to govern them. Even Christians who grew up in the church will come back from college and life experiences with views they were not brought up in, and when thrust into a power position will produce conflict. They may even deny the existence of the God of the Bible, replacing Him with a mystic force or idea, but still hold onto their church without the faith.

Conflict is a normal spice of life, and an outgrowth of our sinful nature that we are supposed to have dominion over. Just as God warned Cain that sin was *“crouching at your door”* that he needed to master it or it would overtake and destroy him. Cain did not listen to God, but only to his anger and inclinations, and the first interpersonal conflict resulted in the taking of the first life.

Conflict is something we all are capable of causing. Conflict is also something we are called to master and be involved in its ending. Just as with any sin, we have the natural desire to sin but we also have the natural ability not to. Even the non-Christian has the ability not to sin but, as far as I know, no one in the entire human history has ever gone without sinning with the exception of Christ. Calvin taught that non-Christians have the civil ability to follow the Law (Civil), and this is the reason why they do good works without being saved. Thus we should take heed to our responsibility as Christians on what God calls us to. One thing God does not call us to is conflict and strife, even though the non-Christian may think different because of our actions.

Conflict is not always something evil or bad. We must remember that God will allow all things to work for good for His glory. Sometimes a church can split and then there are two and so forth, a way of church planting. That is why there are so many Denominations. Sometimes conflict draws people together for a cause and perspective, such as when I was involved with "Operation Rescue." Conflict can open opportunities and communities and bring them together, but we are not to cause conflict for this effect. Well-managed conflict can be healthy and inspire growth to the church and to people spiritually. When a person sins and is disciplined and, then comes out with repentance, they grow and become more effective for Christ versus if there was no discipline and they keep sinning.

Our responsibility is first to realize the diseases we previously discussed and their causes and cures. We also need to remember that love covers a multitude of sin. Love is the first fruit where all the other fruits derive from (Gal. 5) and sanctification is our growth in Christ. Our salvation is the result of love that the redemption of Christ paid for. So if you are a bitter person, then you discover love, the bitterness is muted and will be erased by seeking the forgiveness of Christ. Then the fruit is to go to others whom we have offended to seek their forgiveness: conflict terminated. When we are full of pride, the polar opposite of love, we will be unable to manage conflict effectively but only spread it out of our pride. We need to keep the focus on the love of Christ as our baseline for all that we do.

Yes conflict management is a hard act to do, and my least favorite job in the church, but it is a necessity for a healthy church. So to avoid the conflict in the first place is to have a Biblical plan to resolve it. And when we play Ostrich and bury our head in the ground, the strife keeps building and we become the wicked servant who hides their Talents instead of investing for His Body: Because one of the main aspects of being in Christ is accountability. We are first accountable for our sins that Christ covers and mutes, then we respond with the attitude of love to God, and then to His people, i.e. the great commandment.

Being a disciple of Christ and making disciples requires the devotion, nurture, commitment to the Word, and worship. Most mature Christians would agree on these basics, but what else is required is discipline, the ability to be

studious, and to be accountable. Certain behaviors are not acceptable in the church, such as fornication; thus we are called to get rid of them. The sins and the people doing and continuing in them are destructive to themselves and others and, if they refuse to cease, must be dealt with. The Westminster Confession states,

“Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.”
(Westminster Confession XXX.iii)

Church censure is not a politically correct thing to do in a society that tolerates anything except righteousness. But if we do not resolve these conflicts and have a plan to deal with them, then we are in violation of a higher order. We need to concern ourselves with what is best for His church, not what is best for our culture. Culture is a reflection of peoples desires and plans converging synergistically. The church is a convergence of the people of God giving God the glory. They are separate entities, even though the culture is worshipping in and leading the church. We sometimes need to be not ‘politically correct’ and we may suffer some rebuke from our culture and society. But the consequence from not acting, that so many churches do creates the diseases of destruction. The purpose is not to punish, but to pursue reconciliation and repentance.

Our basis and starting point is God’s character. Peter tells us *“we are to be holy because God is holy,”* and the way we can respond to this call is by being accountable in our personal lives as believers and as a church. So we need to realize that one of our calls is to participate in conflict management so the wickedness of our nature does not get out of hand. God’s Word does give us the guidelines and focus for proper confrontation and the management of problems, so we can be more effective in His service.

Types of Conflict

There are three main categories of conflict:

First there is **Interpersonal** Conflict. These are the conflicts on personal grounds, such as between church members, staff and leadership. ‘Interpersonal’ conflict is the typical disagreement between two or more people. I would venture to say that over 90% of all conflict are in this category. These can be disagreements on who is going to sing in the choir or lead a study when there is one spot and more than one person desiring it. The interpersonal conflict may then escalate into a negative confrontation that will require intervention. You will find a whole host of various forms for this category, such as gossip, slander,

legalism, power controls, false teaching, and the list can go on and on. If the church has a good system to deal with it, then little conflict would escalate to the point of confrontation. We Christians can be like little kids seeking what we can get away with until the parent figure comes back. This is just our human nature.

The second type of conflict is **Intrapersonal** Conflict. This is the conflict with your self-desires versus what God calls us to. This is the personality and desires of an individual seeking to change and to grow that is in conflict with the sinful nature or other beliefs and ways. The new life in Christ versus the old ways of sin. And this is not limited to new Christians, in fact this type of conflict is caused by older 'church grown' people more than any one else in my experience. This struggle becomes like a group of politicians all campaigning for dominance and the office they seek. This is where our spiritual crisis comes into play. And when the wrong dominance takes over the will of the Christian, then the self is in conflict with the church, and the self is fighting God's character which produces the moodiness and power plays we so often see. Virtually all 'passive' conflict is the result from these struggles in some form, and where a lot of our church fights and even family struggles derive from.

This is where the famous adage, "for evil to happen all that needs to be done is for good men to do nothing," effects the church and family. Such as I desire to be a good parent, but I do not want to yell at my kids. I want my kids to be happy at dinner so I will give them what they want, even though this might cause health problems when they grow up. Mr. Ed always has to teach the 6th graders, but they do not like him, and Mr. Ed is mean and uncaring to his students. But we do not want to try to recruit someone new or offend Mr. Ed, so we do nothing. These are the conflicts we deal with personally, but can creep into the "Interpersonal" category, such as my spouse insists the kids eat vegetables, but I do not. This is different from bipolar disorders where the person is schizophrenic (multiple personalities in conflict for dominance and control), here it is just being human. The desire to seek our way in the easiest means possible. Thus, the struggle to try to prevent or side step conflict in fact escalates it.

This category also can also mean personality conflicts. Such as I just do not like so and so's personality. I do not like people who are loud, so, since Mrs. Sims is loud, I will prevent her from being elected for the position of Deacon. Thus, there is no logic or cause for the conflict, just the fact we do not like someone or something based on our experience and perceptions. Or, I do not like praise music in church. So I will do all that I can to prevent it being introduced in our worship. Feelings in the most cases override listening and logical Scriptural study. It is about my whims regardless of anyone else's. This is the category where we will twist Scripture around out of its context to make our points, to conform the Bible to our reasoning. And when the strong willed person with their whims firmly planted in the ground meets the leader or church member who carefully studied the matter that is in disagreement-BANG, conflict breaks out! Or it can be just two groups who did carefully study a problem but came to two

different conclusions. Because we will do anything to back up our reasoning, as humans we do not like to be in the wrong.

The third category is **Substantive** Conflict. These are the conflicts of moral grounds. This is the area that theological disputes come from. The conflict over vision or goals, color of the hymnal's, or it can be values such as abortion. The issue is not personality or people, but a cause. This can quickly escalate into Interpersonal and Intrapersonal conflict, and the reason why a lot of churches split.

Cultivating a Biblical Solution

We need to look to God's Word as the primary example for our interpersonal relationships and to the ways we confront, extol, and exhort people with love and care. There are scores of examples of conflict in Scripture and how it was handled properly and improperly. For example, Paul confronted the churches in his letters to live for Christ. He gave them encouragement, pointed out their errors, and taught the right way of behaving. David did not do well in his confrontation with Uriah and again with Nathan, but learned and grew from his experience, even though he suffered the consequences of his actions.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."
(James 5:16)

God calls us to confess our sins to each other and to Him. We are not called to go to a mediator, but wise counsel and guidance can help us go through issues. There is such a negative backlash in some churches against the Catholics, that Evangelicals "throw out the baby with the bath water." Too many Evangelicals say we do not need to confess sins to each other, but only to God, yet we see in Scripture the opposite is true. Confrontation is Biblical and we are called to exercise it diligently and with caution. Confessing sins is a mandate and the essential aspect of forgiveness and resolving conflict!

"God will deal with each of us upon the principle which sways our own life, and if we adopt a stern and severe mode of action, we must expect the same rule to be carried out in our case." (C.H. Spurgeon, "Evening Sept 10")

The following is a Biblical model to confront someone on the basis of sin and/or wrong doing, or to handle disagreeable rifts in the body. These 5 steps are based on Matthew 18.

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it

to the church and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

STEP 1: Remember Spiritual Maturity:

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

The goal of confrontation is restoring the individual to healthy relationships, helping them to reconcile their relationship to the Lord, to themselves, to their family, and church family. The moderator, the person who will confront, must be a person who sees the Lord as Lord and is not driven by fear and guilt or personal agenda to solve problems. An attractive attitude is essential for moderation, not aggressiveness and control. God does not need any more Pharisees, because “they are not fair you see!” We must hunger after our Lord and not after power, we are to be servants and create communities of servants. The person doing the confronting must have a healthy perspective of the Scriptures regarding the issues, be willing to suggest a wise course of action, or refer the person to someone who can.

We always need to approach these situations with a win attitude, not so much that the one intervening is right, but with the perspective of restoration and healing of the people involved. This is the win we want. We also, most importantly, are to be in prayer and to be seeking Grace for ourselves and the person we are confronting! And when we are in an attitude of Grace, then we will be of a humble attitude and, thus, not give in to pride and think of ourselves as a weapon of God. Self-righteousness is a self-destructive weapon and is of no use to our Lord.

Do you as the person confronting have anything to gain or lose, or do you have any preconceived ideas or prejudices? If so, then seek someone else to moderate. Are you a person who is open and honest to their problems? If not, seek someone else. Are you willing to take the heat of criticism, having the person dump on you or blame you? If not, seek someone else. The leader or moderator of the conflict must never be there for self-gain. We must never see conflict resolution as a means of control and to be in a position of power. We are to show who is the Christ, not who is boss in the church, because we are not it, He is! The last thing you want to do is escalate the problem.

STEP 2: Listening and Recognition:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

“So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” (Luke 17:3)

When you have firsthand information or some reasonable proof that a sin has been committed and/or a conflict needs to be reconciled, then it is the call of the church to deal with it. So a friend, elder, or pastor needs to go to the person privately and confidentially to deal with it. They need to be sensitive to the feelings and frustrations they may encounter, and the motives of the people involved.

We need to establish goals and objectives for the parties involved or the individual who sinned. What can we accomplish and how can we do it should be in the mind of the leader. If not, then the emotions will take over and will turn into anger and further the conflict. Try to see yourself as part of a team with the parties involved settling the matter and not adversaries with a judge.

We need to be objective and speak to the person directly, not go to or through someone else. We are not to make assumptions, such as women are overly emotional, because both men and women are equal in producing and being blinded by emotions. Assumptions will cover our ears from listening effectively. Then ask key questions, be good listeners to the situation, be in prayer and seeking discernment. Look and seek what will benefit both parties, what they agree on. What are the reasonable steps to solve this issue? We are not to be focusing on the behaviors and emotions, but seeking the root cause of the dispute. We need to be looking at the structure of the arguments and the underlying cause, not the emotionalism, and not the first reaction we may have. We need to focus on the attitude of the person over their behaviors, so we are not being sarcastic, nagging them, or putting them down. We must always go to God's people (saved and un-saved, we are all God's people, because He created us) with a servant's heart. We need to be speaking to the person with love, without the words of “you always” or “you never.” We are not called to be sarcastic or naggers, but encouragers. Most people in argumentative situations are focused on the emotion and believe they have the truth, but few will check out the facts, only to rely on the power of their feelings and fears.

We need to ask ourselves questions like: Is there a problem? Is it rumor or fact? What is the person's story and what is the other side? Is there an offense that needs to be confronted or rumors that need to be put down? If it is some political game or power struggle, how can we solve this without taking sides? A leader must seek out and destroy the petty games in church politics by seeking to work with the people to find common ground and resolution before the disciplinary process.

Questions such as, do you have a plan and Scriptures to back you up? Is there a trust level between you and the person? Do you know the history? Has this person done it before? Have you discerned the real issues or willing to do

so? Is one party to benefit over the other so it may cloud the true issue? Is it guilt by association or has there been careful measurement and analysis of the situation? Are you willing to verify the facts in the situation, review the evidence, and listen to the other side? Can you see through assumptions to get to the root of the matter? Are you willing to say, "I do not know but I'm willing to find out?" And are you willing to apologize if your confrontation is in error?

It is important to realize that not all conflict is sin. Although most conflict can and will lead to sin, it is not always a sin problem.

Then you need to ask questions specific to the problem being confronted. Coming to the situation with, "How can I help you? I see this as a temporary problem that we can overcome. May I share with you a concern I have? May I say to you that you are an important part of our church family, and your well being is a top concern of mine, because we care for you? You are not alone in this. You are a part of a church family that loves and cares for you. We have a God who loves and cares for us. How can we come along side you...? I know this is hard and a challenge and I know this situation is temporary and we can overcome it, are you willing...? You know God's Word has a lot to say to us in these situations, we all have been there...? It is a challenge to obey God's Word, but he gives us the power and ability to do so...?"

When settling disputes, have each party state what they believe about the situation, and what they want out of the conflict. Have a secretary carefully write it out and then go over it, clearing up any misunderstandings. Then ask each party separately what are their hidden motives that they did not want to share with the other party and what are their desires and fears? Then come back and go over what each side said in a non-argumentative non-condemning atmosphere! Then ask why does each party feel that way. What do we agree on? What are the motivations? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the perspectives of each party? If there are still points that diverge, work on an equitable solution and commitment to heal and grow from this experience. What can we do for both parties to benefit from this? What will be the result of the various and final decisions? Then seek the Scriptures and spend time in prayer, significant time, and not popcorn prayers! Remember that not everyone will agree with everything! But there must be an agreement on personal growth, mutual respect, and compromise (as long as it is **not** a significant Theological or Biblical point!) so not to destroy relationships and hurt the Body of our Lord. Make sure it is the right decision and not just the most equable or acceptable one!

We need to be sensitive to the process here in Matthew, that we do not rush through it, but allow it to unfold carefully and not to jump to conclusions. Do not be afraid to take your time. And at the same time be sensitive to stop bad situations as they emerge. The action must be stopped in its tracks, but the healing process will take the time to unfold. Now if there is a severe situation

such as child abuse or someone is in danger, yes we need to act very quickly and involve the local police authorities.

Take caution to not just look at the surface and emotions of the incident, but the underlying cause, and this takes time and discernment. Waiting and hoping it will go away is a sin and will destroy you and your church! Being passive and trying to please everyone will put out the fires, but the ambers will simmer until they explosively reemerge. We must have the courage to act quickly, be sensitive to the people, and allow the time and process to heal.

So if you are sure, proof positive, that a sin has occurred, then just between two people, friend to friend, pastor to individual, or elder to individual, confront the person in the spirit of love and care, with the first step and goal firmly in mind. Here is the tough part of sharing the fault and problem, if the person refuses to listen, then it must be escalated to a “supervisor” step 3. If the person acknowledges the wrong and repents, keep the matter private and confidential. The person has been won over, and healing can begin. An effective leader and mature Christian will always be in prayer, listen and discern the issue, and go to the individual with Scripture and in love.

STEP 3: Semi-Private Reconciliation and Goal Setting:

If the person refuses to listen and continues in sin or conflict, and you have checked out the facts and both sides, then you need to involve an elder or pastor. So two, no more than three at this stage, go to the person and confront and moderate a solution. Again, remember the Fruits of the Spirit and the goal of bringing the person in a right relationship with Christ and the body of the church.

Conflict resolution is easy when both parties agree, but more often than not someone will not bend because of **their** principles. God’s call for us is to be peacemakers, which we are to pursue it, *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* (Romans 14:19) As the person who mediates the conflict, it is our responsibility to create the peace. We cannot afford to see if they come up with a solution themselves, although they may just do so. Sometimes people just need a listening ear or to hear the other side. We have to remember to be prepared to build up one another and not tear down.

This is also the step you need to set goals and benchmark a plan. The first step is a friendly word that may end the problem, if not a plan of attack is needed. The goal is resolution and peace in the congregation. It is not always about who is right and who is wrong. So bring both parties together to explain their side and listen with the rule of no interruption to the others retort and argument. Then allow a response again without any interruption from either party. Each side must feel the freedom to express themselves clearly without fear of retaliation or guilt. Then they need to agree to an equitable solution by the moderator with a win/win scenario in mind. You can even give the parties the ownership of seeking a

solution, this might motivate them even more. But the attitude of my way or no way must be neutered. There cannot always be an “I win and you lose attitude,” our focus is on the Lord and His plan for us and not our perceived will.

The moderator is the catalyst and may not have the answers, their job is to keep the peace with an atmosphere of acceptance and care, and provide a winnable plan. They may intercede for clarification, to refocus on the issue, or to put out personal attacks. Stick to the facts and issues in hand. Do not allow old issues buried for years to resurface. You may need to focus on a plan to prevent continual conflict if there is a history between the parties. This is so that the conflict does not come back in the future in a different area.

The moderator, after listening, provides various creative solutions. If no solution is at hand imminently, then set the next meeting date, be in prayer and take the time for research and good Biblical plan and solution. Make sure all the information has been let out and all the best alternatives are given credence. If no solution can be brought forward, then an outside source may be sought, such as a consultant or the court system. But beware, these outside solutions will not provide any more solutions than the capable leader but will bring high costs and consequences. That is why God’s Word tells us to settle the matters ourselves.

We must realize that there is not always an agreed solution, someone may feel they were not listened to and get offended when they do not get their way. So we need to agree to disagree sometimes. It is okay to not always to have a solution when the parties cease their war. So in the beginning, explain that cooperation and unity in Christ is the focus. Life is about relationships and not self-desires. We must be willing to compromise, unless it is on Biblical grounds or compromising our integrity and morals. Conflict handled correctly will strengthen the church and grow the people further in their walk with Christ, if handled correctly.

“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” (Matthew 18:16)

“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you.” (Deuteronomy 19:15-20)

STEP 4: Church Counsel:

“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Matthew 18:16;

“Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.” (I Timothy 5:20)

When step 3 and 4 fail then you involve the elders, and the Bible tells us that resolving conflict is one of their primary roles. Take the person before the elder board of your church. (This step is in response to sin and moral and Biblical deviations. Personal conflicts reside in steps 1-3, unless both parties agree to the moderation of the elders, and the elders agree to it, but the decision of the elders must be agreed that it is final, and no escalation beyond.) Do this before going public, this gives the person one last chance, and involves the key leadership in the process. Most denominations have this in their piety for good reason.

Basically the elders go through the same first 4 steps. As the primary leaders of the church they will have more leverage and sociological pressure that the first 2 or 3 people may not have had. Thus this step is like carrying the case to the supreme court.

STEP 5: Public Action:

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:17-20)

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” (II Thessalonians 3:6;14-15)

“Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.” (Titus 3:10)

“Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (I Corinthians 5:5)

If all the steps did not work, and if you are sure beyond a reasonable doubt, then the matter needs to go before the church publicly. The problem needs to be dealt without violating others confidences, and the details and specifics do not need to be public. Absolutely no crowd-pleasing tactics should ever be used! Leaders are called to clarify and not cloud the issues.

The elders and pastor must be people above reproach, so their word can be trusted without question. If the individual or group or faction refuses to repent and make any needed restitution, then they are to be disfellowshipped. And when they come to conviction and repentance, they are to be let back in fellowship with all the love and care of the prodigal son. Just a simple statement that the person is no longer welcomed and they are to be left alone until the leadership states otherwise. If they are seen in the church, then the pastor or elder is to escort the person away (they may receive help, but the normal member should not be involved, unless asked to do so).

Fortunately I had to do this only twice in my ministry career personally. And believe me this was extremely difficult. Although one of the aspects of being a church growth consultant is also being a conflict resolution 'specialist', which I personally hate doing. I try to avoid it by trading with other consultants and take the tasks that they do not like. Yet, it seems I play referee in churches far too often, over cases that should have never escalated beyond step 2! My two personal cases involved a member calling and harassing the single women, to the point he was stalking. All of the 4 steps were used and finally he had to be disfellowshipped! I even had to warn other churches of this man, because I found out he had done it before in another church, and refused to stop, thus will keep on doing 'his thing'. You can call this 'step 6', that if the person is going to cause harm to another body of believers, it is your job to warn them. You can do this discreetly by going to the town's ministerial fellowship, and even local police authorities and court for a restraining order if considered necessary.

One church I worked with had to get a restraining order because someone who was a volunteer was harassing children, and would continue elsewhere without intervention. This was years ago before 'child molesting' was in the public eye, today he would be in prison. The other case had to do with a divorced couple that went very nasty, and one was asked to find another church to keep the peace.

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself." (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

When we have properly dealt with the issue and people in a loving way, while confronting the problem in truth and with Scripture, then you can rest in the knowledge that you have fulfilled your duty and obligation and call from the Lord. The person is in the hands and providence of God. The Lord may choose to let the person live in their sin and the consequence there of; I John 5:16. *“If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.”* The person may be subject to being chastised by God with an assortment of consequences, such as disease, broken relationships, or may be called home to Heaven if they are a Christian, or ‘elsewhere’ if the person is not a Christian. It is extremely important to release our control and realize that God is the only one capable of changing a person’s heart. There is nothing we can do but point out what is in Scripture with the Fruits of the Spirit working in us. We as Christians and leaders cannot force our will and beliefs on others, all we can do are share and try to persuade. We cannot force ethical and values on others. Values come from the character of the existential core of the person that only they and God have access to. We must be in prayer and be willing to turn the people over to our Lord. We are to trust and obey Him ourselves and be the example that He calls for, and do the same with trusting that God is working in the lives of others too, even when it does not seem so.

“because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” (Hebrews 12:6)

“That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.” (I Corinthians 11:30)

“but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:14-15)

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Conflict II Proper Attitude and Motives

Proper Attitude and Motives

We must remember that as a Christian and ambassador of Christ, we are to proceed any endeavor with the Fruits of the Spirit where love is our focus. We must have the proper motives before we can be the peace makes and resolve the conflict. Galatians tell us,

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test

his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” (Galatians 6:1-5)

We are to take seriously the call to be responsible for each other in love and care. When we help each other, even in the midst of conflict, to point out sin and wrong doing, we are helping that person. We need to take seriously the call that our Lord gave us, that we are positioned to be peacemakers and help in the restoration process of all humankind from evangelism to conflict management.

Restore gently is with the attitude of love and care, not being overly harsh and, especially, not allowing our anger and outrage to get the best of us. God did not express His anger and outrage to us or we would be space dust, rather He gave patience and grace. We are to reflect and replicate His way and not ours. The primary goal with any confrontation is the restoration of the individual, just as it is God's will to restore us in our love relationship with Him. The goal is not the chastising; this is not a sport, but a serious manner where the person must be dealt with the motive and attitude of respect.

Our churches are riddled with conflict and we need to realize the frustration levels of the people we deal with. Most Christians can and will act in a very ungodly manner and, basically, bite the hand that feeds them. The forces that drive them are fear. Fear of change, fear of being wrong, fear of being embarrassed, and a fear of having no control. We need to see the root motives of others and ourselves in order to deal with the attitude and situations respectfully. When we are ministering to those who are insecure and bring our own insecurities, then the proper attitudes will be cut off and our effectiveness will be mute. Our motives must not be self based but Christ based, so when we go into a conflict situation we can deal with it in a levelheaded attitude.

Our own motive must be in the restoration of God's people from sin, not the work of the Holy Spirit, but our call of being constructive and providing solutions, not more strife. Our call is to extol people, that is to come along their side with comfort and help. We are to help each other grow in our relationships with God and each other. And with this motive in mind, sheepdog people on the right path when they veer off, as a loving parent does with a child. As a community of believers, we are responsible for each other, including the actions and deeds that we extol on to each other. We are also responsible to extol each other onto the right path. So conflict management is not a double barrel shotgun, but the love to extol and lift up each other. Conflict management must have the best interests in mind for the people involved as well as the church, and most importantly a driving force to glorify our Lord. We get ourselves into trouble when we try to be a savior/ super hero and 'save the day,' so we look good. Our focus is not just to look good, but lift up our Lord.

Be Prepared Spiritually

Before a leader or any Christian can be effective to extol each other, we ourselves must be prepared. Extol is defined when attributed to God as to give praise very highly, that goes beyond emotion and experience, but into a deep commitment and passion. Extol is also the ability to encourage and lift up someone beyond just to tolerate and put up with. So we need to extol as our Lord did for us and then extol to each other. We also need to extol with gentleness and firmness when we confront and encourage the person being confronted. Sometimes the person we confront is innocent, and we need to follow our Constitutional law of innocent until proven guilty, this is Biblical.

So when we confront someone, it must be to lift him or her up while pointing out the grievance and we have to be prepared mentally and spiritually to do this. This is why it is important that someone new to the faith, or someone not as mature, should not get involved in conflict management. Our preparation in any situation is our maturity in the Lord, and the knowledge of the situation, the person, and ourselves. We need to ask ourselves these questions so we can confront with the proper attitude and motive.

First, we must be willing to deal with conflict in a healthy manner and not hide ourselves from it. Are you willing to abide to the mandates of Scripture or are you too engrossed in your anger? If not, you cannot possibly be objective and listen. Are you yourself willing to admit your mistakes and sins, if not, how can you expect others to do so? Are you driven by God's Word and not your own will so you can listen and be objective? Can you, as a person in Christ, handle change and growth where you have not been before? If not, how do you propose to handle others with encouragement and help where you have not been? Do you have the confidence to go against the peer pressure and expectation of others if they are not in alignment with God's Word in order to stand up for truth? If not, you will not have the courage to extol to the level the person may need. Do you have the thick skin and tenacity to listen to self-criticism without it effecting your self-esteem? That is if someone accuses you falsely, can you stand up with confidence of who you are in Christ and not melt away? These characteristics must precede the conflict management process, if not, you will create an even bigger mess. Remember you cannot do the work of our Lord effectively until you are modeling His Character!

The good capable leader will be sensitive to the recognition of the seeds of conflict. That is the type of conflict that simmers below the public surface that we do not show until we are "fed up." Such as people avoiding other people, with such comments like, "I just do not like Timmy" or "I am just not drawn to that person or personality." Now it is unrealistic to expect everyone to like everyone else. As Christians, we will all end up in Heaven together, so we should get along, but we do not. There are tendencies for simple personality dislikes turning into eruptions, we should beware of them and have a plan to deal with them. When we have our radar screens up for conflict detection at its earliest, it will prevent blow-ups later.

A few years ago there was a story in the LA paper of a woman in Florida who won the lottery. She called her live-in boyfriend, told him the news and told him to pack. He responded, thinking they were going on a trip, "That's great, what should I pack, for hot or cold weather?" The woman responded, "I don't care as long as you are out before I come home!" Life is full of interpersonal storms. Either we are in a storm or we are leaving a storm, but one thing is clear, a storm is sure to be on the way! So how we deal with it will make the difference of a bump in the road or all out divorce.

The storms of life can be such a frustrating experience, but also a source of growth and maturity. But the crisis in of themselves can be an opportunity or a danger, as the Chinese word for crisis expounds both the characters of danger and opportunity. They come into our life sometimes without a hint of warning, and other times it is our own miss planning and arrogance that gets in the way and creates the problem. We cannot avoid them, so we need to learn how to deal with crisis in a Biblical and mature manner. If not, the results can and will be devastating and un-repairable.

The pastor must beware of his leaders' situation and the maturity level of their leadership. If the elders are not mature enough to handle a disagreement in a calm level and encouraging way, then they will just make the situation worse. Because in an unhealthy and immature church (which most churches fall into these days), a pastor or leader who confronts the wrong person of sin or any situation will find their bags packed and office vacant. I have seen this situation in church growth consulting over and over. The people who are supposed to suppress it in the first place blow a simple disagreement way out of proportion. Maturity is your key. The problem is most people think they are mature, but in fact they are not. Your template for finding your and the leaders maturity level is in Galatians 5. A pastor can survive having sinned greatly himself, such as infidelity, but they will not survive confronting a key money giver or key personality in the immature church. This is extremely unfortunate, and a lot of leg work needs to be done to disciple and help a church mature, or seek another call and wipe the dust off your feet.

To be a healthy church, we must have a plan of action on how to handle conflict. The ability to deal with conflict as it emerges will allow a church to stay healthy and vibrant. So it is my goal to show from Scripture a simple model of conflict management that can provide the foundation of understanding to create and implement this essential value in church leadership. It is the wise and mature church that can receive and give criticism as well as to have a written out Biblical plan to deal with it when it ventures off too far.

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Agreeing to Disagree without Disunity

We as mature Christians need to see the distinction of God's providence working in the lives of His people, and the pettiness of our actions. God is in control and He will win no matter what we do. The tone of Paul's letters to resolve the various conflicts in the churches center on one crucial theme. Whatever the disagreement was, either the role of women, the spiritual gifts, the role of leadership, and the authority of the church all centered on surrendering to the Lord and not to the flesh. Two thousand years later, we are dealing with the same issues that Paul dealt with. So how do we respond? Just as Paul stated as led by the Spirit, we must allow ourselves to be taught by the Word and surrender to the Lordship of Christ and not ourselves! And Paul continues to remind us that we are to express our oneness in Christ by being loving and accepting to others because Christ was and is accepting and loving of us.

True wisdom will solve any conflict, and our desires will keep us from seeing it. Our envy and selfish desires will always get in the way, and God's Grace will eventually mute our reckoning and bring the peace. So we must focus on the major issues and tenets of the faith, such as key theological issues just as Paul did. Paul took to task the issues of the physical Resurrection of Christ and Faith Alone by what Christ has done that saves us. Paul did not call us to be perfect but we should be able to handle moral and values as our Lord would. Thus the minor issues should be agree to disagree, such as the role of women in leadership. My denomination recently split over this issue, because the key areas of conflict management were not used.

It is always best to be a listener to God, so we are in tune with Him and not to ourselves! From our pettiness come the conflicts that ruin relationships and property. From our Lord come the Grace, Mercy, and Goodness that creates the Peacemaker. When we are in tune, then we will be that peacemaker with our submissive hearts, minds, and souls, which flow the good Fruits of the Spirit to be bearers of Righteousness and not bearers bringing contemptible actions into our relationships and His church! Remember James 3 & 4, and the true causes of conflict.

Taking the Lead

The leader of the church will face all sorts of attack and conflict and thus must be rooted in the principles we talked about in the chapter on "The Leadership Challenge." So the result is we need to be in good and solid relationships with the people we serve, while at the same time are sensitive to their motives as well as frustrations. So the leader will be able to discern situations, the dynamics, and personalities involved without they themselves getting pulled into the conflict. Remember we are called to serve Christ and His body and not to fight. Yet people will take advantage of you and misunderstand your motives to resolve conflict. Most people, including Christians, have a

spurious nature, a better understanding of strife, and a harder time accepting the Biblical principles of peace. A Mature Christian will respond to criticism with gentleness and never respond to anger with anger or power with more power, we are to respond in the character of Christ and truth.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.” (Proverbs 15:1-3)

The leader must be willing and able to get above the situation without emotional or preconceived ideas, so we can be objective as well as to listen and share the Love of our Lord. The leader must be able to facilitate an atmosphere of trust and encouragement, so the congregation looks to them for their lead. If not, the conflicts will get worse. So the result of our actions will be to get closer to our critics and not push them away. Do not follow your natural tendencies to fight back or get even, God calls us higher. So see the people who are critical to the plan of peace and see them as opportunities to teach and model the correct way of church government from God’s Word. Leaders are not combatants, but are peacemakers who moderate and understand so they can intervene with the Grace of our Lord.

Maturity is the key interpersonal force that will seek the truth and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit to facilitate the growth and healing; because constructive criticism and conflict will be a catalyst to personal and church growth. This will create bonding and forgiveness and love will permeate, though there will be struggle in the process. The leader/moderator, when successful, must never give in to pride and self-glorification. Always be humble and realize your depravity and brokenness before a Holy God! Our will must be in surrender and our realization in the power of our Lord to heal in the situation. It is not about us, it is always about our Lord.

The leader is not a force of personality and strong-willed inclinations, but is a servant and a heart after His. So the result will be to give compassion to those who we feel do not deserve it, to love the unlovable, to help those who bite us, to lead those who want to go it themselves, and to do it with a smile and grateful heart. Under the veneer of the critical person is a child that needs to be guided. They may seem self-confident, but usually they are full of fear and mask it with the rough exterior of criticism. They may have had a life filled with conflict and shame and have no way of interacting socially but to be instigators of conflict because they grew up that way. The good news is what Christ has done, the acceptance and love He offers, and the healing and growth that will result from it. Remember the section on “Spunk” in “The Leadership Challenge,” risk is a necessary element of moderating and leading, not self-seeking and self-protection, they only lead away from our Lord.

When Do We Engage in Conflict

There are times when we as Christians are called to arms, as the song goes, *“onward Christian soldiers.”* As they said in the Middle Ages, *“if the cause is just...”* of course most of the causes were not just. But for us, if there is a situation that must be defended, we need to prepare ourselves and be willing to fight for our Lord. Conflicts that are worth fighting for are such as moral and value issues, spiritual warfare, evil desires, or physical attack.

“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.” (Galatians 2:11)

If someone is going to assault you or a family member and all means available to involve the authorities is exhausted, then we fight. I personally do not get into fist fights, but as a youth pastor, I was on a trip where one of my girls was being assaulted and I had to respond to that situation with physical force or the girl would have been raped. There have been numerous times I had to keep bad intentioned people away from my group to protect them and even use physical force. We as leaders must protect the people God entrusts to us. In working in some inner-city areas, I hired security to prevent potential problems with various events. Yes we are to trust in the Lord, but we are also to use commonsense and practical judgment. As Jesus told His disciples to buy a sword, so we need to follow suit. I do not believe we need to literally be buying swords and wearing guns like the old west. But we do need to protect the people under our care.

A case in point, several years ago I was doing some intervention counseling with a couple. The husband was severely beating his wife. So I put her into a battered women's shelter. He then came to me very violently, threatened my life to disclose her location. The police were immediately called, but there was nothing they could do. I heard that the husband found out her location. So I took some elders with me to the women's shelter to protect the wife. She got scared and left the shelter and went home. The husband was in the process of literally killing her, when we showed up, the police were called and we had to wrestle him to the ground. He was a very big man. And I had to knock him out in order to subdue him. It was one of those situations that we may never have to deal with, but they do accrue. By the way it took the police over two hours to show up, as we sat on him; life in the inner city of America.

“He said to them, But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.” (Luke 22:36)

We need to realize we have an enemy who is nearly eternal, and fully desires to interfere, steal and destroy us. So we are called to wage war on Satan and his onerous cohorts. We can do this by prayer and various techniques found

in spiritual warfare resources available in most denominational resources centers and Christian bookstores.

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” (James 4:7-8a)

We need to battle our sinful nature and the evil desires that come up from that nature. If we put no effort in self-discipline, then we will not last long in tough situations or grow to be fully used by our Lord.

“Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” (Romans 8:12-14)

Conflict is almost always necessary when the forces of darkness encroach upon the Christian Life. It is necessary to stand up for the rights of the unborn. It is necessary to fight for morals and values in our schools and government. It is necessary to not yield to Satan and our evil desires. For if we do not take a stand, our fall will be close at hand.

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Preventing Conflict

Most of the conflict we experience in life comes from our selfish desires that insists on our own way over and against others. So we are posed to pounce on each other to get our way, while our Lord looks sadly on our pettiness and calls us to walk above, but do we listen? Desiring something is not necessarily wrong, but when we do not trust our Lord for it, then we have a problem. The Bible calls us to come before a Holy God by what Christ has done and resulting with a fountain of “Living Water” that it is our Lord. We are to rely on Him and not our inclinations. When we do, conflict is sure to erupt. When we walk in faith and realize our position before our Lord Jesus Christ, then we should bypass our self-will and yield to His.

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2:13)

We need to realize how evil we are when we fight with each other because of our personal agendas and desires! It is God alone who provides us

the “Living Waters.” So why do we persist in digging our own wells only to bring up dirt that is useless and worthless?

“Jesus answered her, If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

We can earn nothing on our own, and centrally our salvation is a gift from God, so our behaviors with each other must reflect this undeserved gift that we received free. The free does not mean to engage in war with each other, but pursue peace and love.

So what do we do? How can we restrain our desire to manipulate and control, to be aggressors instead of repairs of relationships? Simply by realizing whom we are before a Holy God and our undeserving gift! Primary conflict is in ourselves, so we need to control the sin that encroaches us, as Cain failed to do. We must discern between what we desire and what is provided to us. We need to discern between our goals and what the will of the Lord is. We need to discern between what we want and what God wants! Then the conflicts and diseases of distraction that leads to destruction will cease! Our Lord already won the ultimate conflict of good vs. evil, of rebellion vs. sovereignty.

Remember that love covers a multitude of sins, so what shall we do? LOVE. The love that Christ had for us when we did not deserve it, and the response of the love we should have for each other. Jesus let go of His place with the Father. Something that we could not conceive, the precious position He gave up for a mission to redeem us. If we pursued the model that Christ laid before us, how much conflict would we have? Practically none! How could we fight with each other when we are each focused on our Lord and each other’s interests? How can we carry on conflicts with each other when we take a deep introspective look into our desires and compare them to the Scriptures? Our focus must not be in our self-awareness, but what Christ has done as a template in our behaviors and actions! By being a true example of our Lord will neuter most conflicts. Intrapersonal conflict will be dissolved because our self-desires will be focused on our Lord, so there will be no conflict with our self-desires. Interpersonal conflict will cease because we will be a community of believers on the same page, especially because we have each other’s interests in mind and are willing to follow the Biblical precepts to solving conflict. So what we are left with is substantive conflicts between beliefs. When we are a community of believers with a high view of the Scriptures, then we will eliminate most of them. So the conflicts will be between believers and aberrant and cult groups, and the minor theological distinctions can be an ‘agree to disagree’ venue.

Have a Contract with the Congregation

“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 do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:29-32)

Most people and church leaders do not like to confront and I’m definitely one of them, but it is a necessity for a healthy church. The biggest reason why people do not like to confront is fear. Fear of the consequences that it will blow up in our face, Fear of losing the relationship, fear of being misunderstood and what our motives are, fear of hurting their feelings, and fear of being the “bad cop.” So why are you afraid? When we have a plan that is endorsed by the leadership and then it is communicated to the congregation, then the fear shall fall. Our fears will turn to the love of the duty. We still may not like it, but it is a chore that can be done without the fear and intimidation as it is associated with.

One of the best ways to prevent conflict is to have a contract with the congregation. All you need to do is draw up a form that everyone agrees to at membership and signs. Keep it simple and straight forward, laying out the responsibility to be a follower of Jesus Christ and to model His character, so gossip, slander will not be tolerated. Then describe the conflict resolution process and the Scriptures behind it. Some congregations have their vision on it too, although this should only be done if the vision is Scripture based, and not personality driven. Learning to control conflict is a key aspect of leadership. Having a process to deal with conflict is key to a healthy church. This will eliminate most, if not all, conflict as long as the church leaders are following it too.

The next step in preventing conflict is to create a church environment that fosters encouragement and growth. This will mute most grounds that start conflict. The pastor should be open (to a degree) to their failures and the congregation should be accepting, then the spirit of humbleness will overtake pride, the main instigator of conflict. Being open about our failures will encourage others to do so, so when someone is going through a tough time, they will feel secure in the knowledge they are not alone.

This is a delicate process, because human pride and our sinful nature will take a person’s openness as a weakness and a sign to attack. Like a predator devouring a wounded animal. Christians have the habit of shooting their wounded. So we need to take this in baby steps, and be discerning on how and what you do share. I have seen to many good pastors be torn down by ravenous congregations, because they sensed blood in the water, and not the hope of Christ.

We need to communicate those attitudes of love and care to the people God has entrusted to us. So we make disciples of Christ and not sharks looking for a meal. We can do this by giving praise and encouragement whenever possible, both publicly and privately. Encouragement goes to those who we feel are biting our hand, the people who do not show love themselves and may seem undecieving, but in God's eyes so are we! We are to give encouragement to people of and with different opinions and perspectives, at the same time keeping them on the Biblical track (Remember the Priesthood of all Believers!). We must be encouragers to all the people, not just those who we like, and it cannot be phony. It must be real in our hearts, if not, you are in the wrong business! So get right with your relationship with Christ first, and if you cannot, then seek help. The church does not need phonies, people will see right through you and your effectiveness will be more negative for the kingdom of God than positive.

We need to be on the lookout for bad attitudes and get to the people as soon as possible with a loving arm of encouragement. By putting out the fires as they begin to smoke will cease the coming war in its tracks. A good leader is diligent and watchful! It is a necessary aspect of leadership to expose the political games people do! We must go to those people, listen to them and seek to find an answer before they arm for war. "How can we come to a understanding and solution rather than dividing...?" Political coalitions, variant agendas, power struggles and prejudices must be in the gun sites of the leadership! And then we can have a healthy church, free of conflict, that is modeling the purpose that Christ has set for us. Then the witness is what Christ has done and not the misguided actions of Christians. Maybe then the Great Commission will be filled!

Here is an example of a "contract with the congregation:"

"Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, and being in agreement with the Vineyard's statements, strategy and structure, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite myself with the Vineyard Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:
I will protect the UNITY of my church

- . . by acting in love toward other members
- . . . by refusing to gossip
- . . . by following the leaders

"So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together." Romans 15:29

"Live in complete harmony with each other – each with the attitude of Christ toward each other." Romans 15:5

"Have a sincere love for your fellow believers, love one another earnestly with all your hearts." I Peter 1:22

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs . . . " Ephesians 4:29

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account . . . Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you." Hebrews 13:17

(From Vineyard Christian Fellowship of San Luis Obispo, Ca)

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Church Staff Conflicts

If it is your desire to destroy and split a church, then simply have no plan to resolve staff disputes. Satan will just love you and your members will be disillusioned and spread bitterness and spiritual distraction to others. Of course, no one truly wants to do this, at least I hope not, so we need to have a plan and atmosphere to prevent and deal with conflicts in the upper management of the church, from the pastoral staff, secretaries, elders and various leaders.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."
(James 5:16)

The pastoral staff may start off with a good relationship, but if there is not the proper format for discussions and communication, you will be laying out a landmine field that the whole congregation will have to tread over. A landmine field filled with distrust, blame, anger, bitterness, attacks and personal misconduct, where the Fruits of the Spirit have fermented and become rotten. An atmosphere of mistrust and tension will replace the true call of the church and the purpose of what we are supposed to be about. I have consulted and been to many such churches over the years, and it is a sad pathetic sight to see pastors arguing and staff meetings full of contempt and tension.

But there are simple steps to prevent this pathetic mess from ever happening.

First, there must be a clear agreement on key theological grounds, if not, a retreat where the Bible is opened and the senior minister goes over the areas of dispute for Biblical recognition. Minor points must be agreed to disagree, if not, the subordinate pastor should seek another call or seek moderation from the Denomination. Pastors must never try to divide and distract the church from its mission, especially in personality matters.

Second, open communication is a must. Each staff member should be able to go to each other and share their feelings and concerns without any reprisal, but with a listening ear. If a staff person refuses to agree with such a policy, they must seek employment elsewhere. Open communication is a tall sign of a healthy church. Closed communication channels is a sure sign that says, "Land Mines Ahead". Thus everyone is too busy watching their steps to accomplish anything of significance for our Lord. Each member of the staff should and must be comfortable to express himself or herself in a clear healthy way so that confrontation is accepted and expected.

Third, and most importantly, the staff team must be in prayer with and for each other. Staff meetings should begin and end in prayer and be in significant time before our holy God in prayer. This will hone the relationship with each other and with God. The result will be cultivated leadership by modeling our Lord, where defensiveness falls aside and misunderstandings are quickly cleared up by the unity in Christ.

The senior staff person/people should be aware of the signs of potential conflict and quickly deal with it. Such signs as avoidance and withdrawal, contempt and over negative criticism, competition, defensiveness, blame, over accommodation, and collaboration. The head of staff needs to be in continual prayer and possess wisdom and discernment to exercise mediation, or should farm out staff conflicts to a third outside party, perhaps a pastor from another church in the same denomination. Most denominations have resources for you to use to have conflict management procedures (if yours does not, seek the resources from one that does), and a 'Employee handbook' that lays out such procedures.

Pastors are walking targets of all kinds of attacks, from fellow pastors, from church members, and from Satan. So having a system to deal with conflict will alleviate 99% of it! Our fight is against the enemy of the ages, our fight is against the self-precepts that cloud our relationship with Christ, and our fight is not against each other. Yet Satan is happiest when we do fight with each other!

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For more insights checkout our Leadership Cannel on the series on conflict: [Church Leadership](#) [Problem Solving](#)

Remember these resources are free for you! Most ministries only sell these materials, we feel we are doing what God has called us to, by going ahead and offering the best materials possible for free and seek support for doing so. There is no obligation but please consider supporting our ministry if you are able to do so. As these materials have cost us a tremendous amount of time effort and financial resources that have taken us years to develop for you!

Feel free to pass this around to any pastor who is overseas or on the mission field who may need it! We also have several other "Pastors Training Packs" available in various languages on: "How to Study and Teach the Bible," "How to Lead and Manage the Church" and many more. As a missions and discipleship organization it is our call to train pastors and provide resources to Christians and Church leaders all over the world. They may print out any information we have posted, reproduce it, make the needed cultural changes and translate it. All we ask of you is to keep us in prayer, keep the name of our ministry and any copyright information on the resources, and tell other pastors what we have to offer. If anyone does translate any of our material, please let us know and give us a copy so we can make them available to others in their language and culture!



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Richard Joseph Krejcir is the Director of "Into Thy Word Ministries," a discipling ministry. He is the author of the book, Into Thy Word, and is also a pastor, teacher, and speaker. He is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California. He has amounted over 20 years of pastoral ministry experience, mostly in youth ministry, including serving as a church growth consultant.