

Resolving Conflict

Participant Handout

Purpose:

Create a climate in which church leadership can deal appropriately with conflict.

Objectives :

- Identify the sources of church conflict.
- Develop processes by which to address issues present in a local church
- Suggest skills profitable for conflict reduction.

I. Scriptural Examples of Conflict

- A. Acts 15:1-35
- B. Acts 6:1-7
- C. Acts 15:36-41
- D. Galatians 2:11

II. Scriptural Support of Conflict Resolution.

- A. "If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of _____" (Galatians 6:1)
- B. "We have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways; we _____ to practice cunning" (II Corinthians 4:2).
- C. "The weapons for our warfare are not _____" (II Corinthians 10:4)
- D. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for _____" (Ephesians 5:21)
- E. "Then let us no more pass _____ on one another...let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual up building (Romans 14:13,19).
- F. "If anyone _____ to obey what we say in this letter, note that man and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (II Thessalonians 3:14)
- G. "Do not look on him as an enemy, but _____him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:15)
- H. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Mend your ways, heed my appeal, _____ with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you" (II Corinthians 13:11)
- I. "Do not _____ an old man, but exhort him as you would a father, treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity" (I Timothy 5:1-2)

The scripture makes clear that we are to do everything we can to keep conflict down, but we are not to _____ confrontation if it is principle-oriented. The problem is: we can find scripture to support our position if we are being _____ or wanting to do the attacking.

A healthy emotional person and an objective leader will accurately _____ what scripture applies when.

III. Constants About Conflict

- A. Conflict isn't always bad or _____.
- B. Conflict _____ even if you have no interest in what the other party wants.
- C. Conflict can start from _____ issues and become a major issue.
- D. Conflict may be _____ in your job description as a leader.
- E. Conflict may occur with someone you _____ or dislike.

If we do not deal with conflict within twenty-four hours, there is only a two percent chance the conflict will ever be dealt with successfully.

IV. Five Traditional Approaches to Handling Conflict

- A. _____
Takes the _____ / _____ approach. A withdrawer believes in "walk away power". He/She will avoid conflict even though they may lose something important.
- B. _____
Take the _____ / _____ approach. Dominators operate as though they have the right and the power on their side.
- C. _____
Take the _____ / _____ approach. Compromisers believe both parties have something to give and something to take. Placators will do about anything to maintain relationships.
- D. _____
Take the _____ / _____ approach. Compromisers believe both parties have something to give and something to take. Compromisers are convinced that both individuals are partially right.
- E. _____
Take the _____ / _____ approach. Collaborators do whatever it takes to get the job done and maintain relationships at the same time.

V. Keys to Conflict Reduction

- A. _____ Trust
 1. Conflict will _____ in direct relationship to the amount of trust built.
 2. _____ one another within the church is a means of building trust.
 3. Trust in the church second only to what is needed in the home.
 4. Where people genuinely _____ each other, trust flourishes.

5. _____ of each other promotes trust, too.
6. When we _____ to our humanness, people are more apt to generate confidence in us.
7. Encouragement is a means of building up trust as well. "You were there when I needed you," (Christian care) _____ the trust factor.
8. Integrity of life _____ trust.
9. Broken confidence _____ trust.
10. Ridicule _____ the trust level.
11. _____ promises wipe out the confidence factor.
12. Conflict does not divide us, but _____ of trust does.

B. _____ Grace

The following is from *Conflict and Caring* by Keith Huttenlocker:

Ethics, as well as grace, suggest to pastors that they do any or all of the following during conflict.

1. Calmly _____ the chastisement of the people.
2. _____ wisely from all warranted criticism, regardless of its origin or manner of presentation.
3. Openly _____ of any wrong or foolishness.
4. Freely _____ those who have trespassed against the pastor and treat them as forgiven.
5. _____ make the requested changes that are not unscriptural or otherwise irresponsible (i.e. harmful to others).
6. Preach and _____ love toward all.
7. Remain an example of _____ and integrity in all situations.
8. Speak and write _____ when addressing the congregation and the outside community.
9. _____ a personal walk with Jesus Christ.
10. _____ authority to that granted by the church bylaws, resisting all temptations to invoke "marshal law."

Small Group Exercise

Read the following case study. After the instructor completes the discussion regarding the study, complete the questions at the end and discuss your opinion with your team members.

When the Leaders Leave

Ron Taylor, district superintendent for 83 churches in the state of Washington, winced as he explained to his wife, Sue his frustration with Bremerton New Life Church. He saw signs of an impending split. Angry members, who were also strong leaders in the local church, were phoning weekly.

The pastor of Bremerton New Life Church was Chuck Parsons, a minister Ron had recommended to the congregation four years earlier. Ron's and Chuck's friendship had been cemented by annual deep-sea fishing trips together. Ron hated even the thought of suggesting Chuck look for another pastoral assignment, but he dared not lose the one church he found in his denomination that possessed the brightest future in Bremerton, a city of 173,000.

Under the previous pastor, a quiet and cultured man with an earned doctorate, Bremerton New Life assimilated able lay leaders of some wealth. These newcomers eagerly assumed responsibilities on the district and generously supported the district superintendent's programs. These contractors, bankers, real estate agents, and management types also involved themselves in key roles in the local church, such as Sunday school superintendent, finance committee, and church board members.

Chuck's predecessor, Neal Gray, told his district superintendent, "I've taken the church as far as I can. The church needs a personable and dynamic leader if it is going to reach its potential." Neal prepared the congregation to accept their new pastor. Members and regular attenders reported genuine enthusiasm with Chuck's arrival. His humor, interpersonal skills, and warm personality raised expectations. Chuck had grown up as a son of a single parent. He had received affirmation from his local church. This acceptance contrasted with the feelings of inferiority that were reinforced by students who called him "Chubby" and "Fatso." As he laughed with them, he discovered that his light-hearted spirit endeared him to others.

Chuck had once told Ron that when he graduated from seminary in his thirties, he felt good about his achievement. His call to ministry was affirmed by the body of Christ. Although he admitted to his district superintendent that he hid himself from others in his humor, Chuck felt God was good to him.

Since Chuck had come to serve Bremerton New Life four years ago, attendance had edged up each year until an average of 143 people worshipped each Sunday. The new members were migrating from the other and usually smaller churches that were in crisis. Meanwhile other churches in town of his denomination were averaging less than 50 in attendance except one which was averaging 70. In Ron's judgment, these churches were poorly located, invariably needed new pastors, and tended to attract dysfunctional people in need of care, but unable to give care to others. Chuck phoned Ron one day to be the first to let him know two families, stable and capable, had left Bremerton New Life to worship at an independent church. Ron soon had reports that six or seven more families were leaving if Pastor Chuck stayed.

Jim, one of the leading members of the church, a businessman and former preacher's son, told Ron, "I have always supported my pastor, but this guy keeps embarrassing me. He appears unprepared for the worship services and his jokes are inappropriate. I won't invite my friends to church -- I haven't for a year and a half. He can't manage himself -- his time or his mouth. He'd be bankrupt if it weren't for his wife who has the business sense. He only fellowships with the down and out. I need a pastor."

Ron wrestled with his options. 1) He could declare this church in crisis and personally intervene. This new ruling by the General Assembly had not been used by him or any other district superintendent he was aware of. 2) He could reverse his advice to Jim and go along with the local leadership's discontent with their pastor. Chuck might feel the pressure and decide to leave on his own. 3) Ron could empower Chuck by openly endorsing Chuck as the pastor. But if forced, Ron had to acknowledge that Chuck did not seem to possess all the tools necessary to please the New Life congregation.

Ron decided to approach Chuck about taking another church. Chuck expressed concern about whether he could do as well elsewhere. After all he was 53 years old and every church might not accept a pastor his age. He enjoyed living in a seaport city and pastoring this particular fellowship. His wife had just received a job promotion. His youngest daughter was a junior in high school. Now was not a good time to make a change. Chuck, concerned that these church leaders were withdrawing, expressed optimism nevertheless. He hadn't received any complaints or lost members in over three months.

Ron smiled wryly at Sue, "Chuck has misread the climate. I got the leadership to back off a few months ago and now Chuck thinks everyone is happy. Honey, 80% of the members support him, but I think he is losing his leadership and their finances and he doesn't know it."

- End -

As a team discuss the following:

What are the best steps to take to solve this case?

What criteria would influence your decision making?