



**SERVANT
LEADERS**
INTERNATIONAL

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This course is a compilation of three sections: (a) Constructive Conflict, (b) Christian Confrontation, and (c) Fireproofing the Church.

It is designed to help the student manage conflict in a positive and edifying manner, both in personal relationships and in the larger church context.

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Credits

Author: David Graef and Cameron Woolford

Graphic Design: Ashley Day

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COURSE: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Description:

This course is a compilation of three sections: (a) Constructive Conflict, (b) Christian Confrontation, and (c) Fireproofing the Church. It is designed to help the student manage conflict in a positive and edifying manner, both in personal relationships and in the larger church context.

Objectives: Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to...

- Know the difference between constructive conflict and destructive conflict.
- See how conflict, properly handled, will strengthen relationships.
- Recognize a conflict before it gets out of hand.
- Assess the cause of the conflictive response in both self and others.
- Make a conversation safe to open constructive dialogue.
- Know how to confront a person while giving him the benefit of the doubt.
- Recognize how feelings drive our actions and tell alternate stories in order to turn negative emotions into curiosity.
- How to restore a brother in sin to God and to the church.

Learning Inputs:

1. Attendance of course lectures
2. Completion of assigned reading

Outcome Activities:

1. Complete Homework Assignments
2. Complete Final Project



CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

God equips us to use/manage all that He has given us. Remember He does through us what we cannot do for ourselves. We are to live out the power of the gospel, demonstrating to the world His power in every area of our lives. We are not saved by works but our works are to demonstrate He lives and acts in us. Even conflict is an opportunity to demonstrate the truth of the Gospel in our lives and relationships.

Romans 12:18

It is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

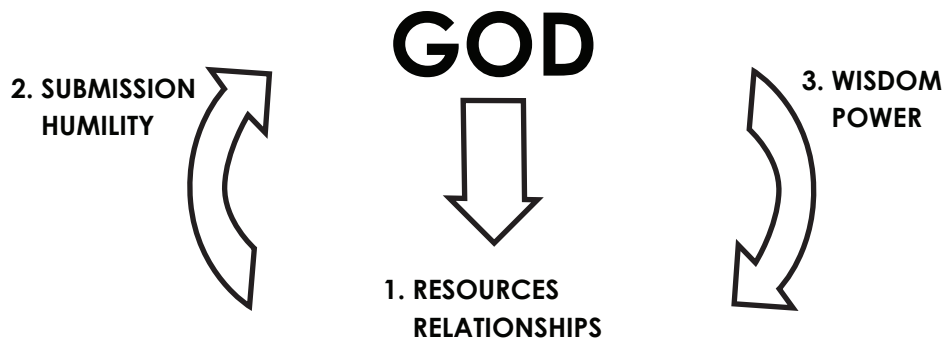
Genesis 12:1-3

I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. Our lives and everything we do are to demonstrate the blessing that God has brought to our lives and to our families.

Phillipians 2:12

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

All that God gives to us we can break down into two groups - Resources and Relationships. Left unto ourselves we can not manage and bring honor to Him with these two. We must first submit to His Lordship over our lives and humbly seek His power and Wisdom to steward our resources and our relationships.



Proverbs 20:24

Man's steps are ordained by the Lord, How then can man understand his way?

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on you're own understanding.

Jeremiah 10:23

I know, O Lord that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.

Phillipians 2:12-13

So then my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absense, work out you're salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Job 34:21

For His eyes are upon the way of a man, and He sees all his steps.



WHERE DOES CONFLICT COME FROM?

Conflict results from real or perceived opposition to one's....

1. VALUES
2. ACTIONS
3. DESIRES AND INTERESTS

I. Values - Priorities that drive my lifestyle, my priorities determine my values.

"Values are the essence of who we are as human beings. Our values take us out of bed each morning, help select the work we do, the company we keep, the relationships we build, and ultimately, groups and organizations we associate with. Our values influence every decision and move we make, even to the point of how we choose to make our decisions." - Dr. Robert Rue

Conflict arises with others when we don't share values that determine where we spend our time, energy and money, etc... This can happen between friends or spouses. It can be as complicated as how to raise children or as simple as where we spend our free time.

II. Actions - The way I live my life with others

When two objects or people make contact they collide in life. This collision can cause conflict due to the choices one makes. For example, I am driving and a man decides to turn left into my lane without looking first. I blow my horn to warn him and now he wants to say that it was my fault! How I react can determine the conflict I am involved in.

III. Desires and General Interests: Sports...

It is interesting that something so simple as the sports team one follows can lead to conflict. We have all seen fights break out at different sporting venues around the world. People who are willing to fight the other teams' spectators just because they follow a different team!

My Perception of Conflict - How I view conflict will determine how I am to react to it in my life. Most people react to it because they don't understand it and know how to manage it correctly.





What do you see ? A Woman? How old?

Our perspective can shape everything.

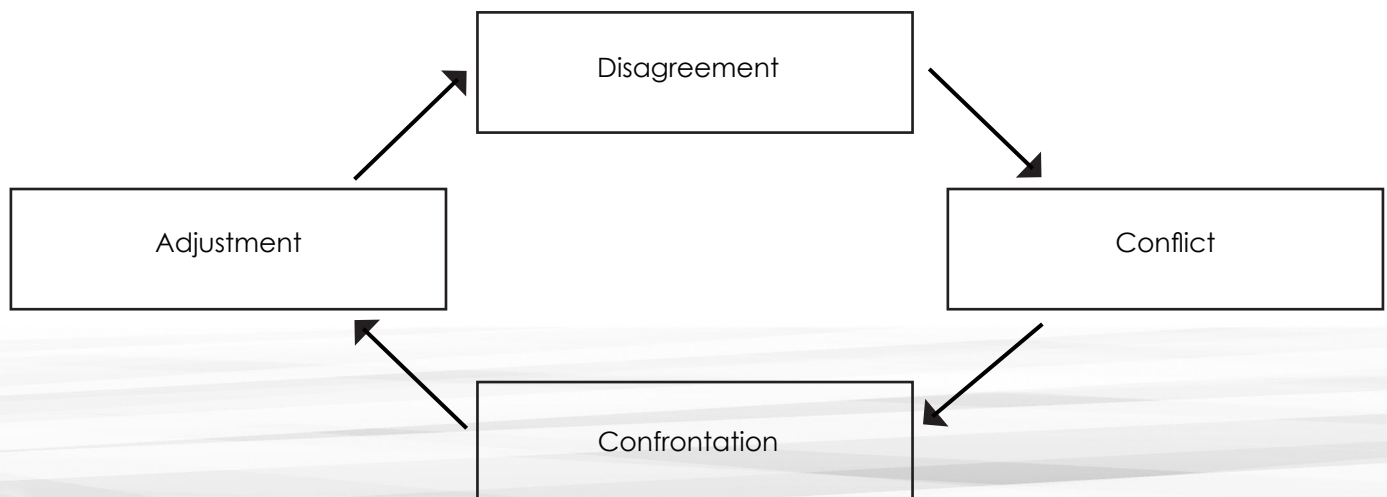
Two Types of Conflict

1. **DESTRUCTIVE** - This is Conflict that can destroy teams turning friends into enemies, separate families and divide churches. Most people believe/perceive all conflict to be destructive in nature.
2. **CONSTRUCTIVE** – This is Conflict that builds strong relationships, creating trust and giving opportunity for personal and relational growth. If we can change how we see conflict we can then equip ourselves to turn it into opportunity for something positive.

DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

Destructive conflict occurs when the actions, the values or the behavior of two or more people result in a collision, rather than seeking a mutually agreeable solution of the conflict. When conflict is mishandled it follows a destructive cycle. Remember that conflict is not the problem but rather how we respond to it. Conflict becomes destructive because of the way we respond to it.

I. The Destructive Cycle:



Conflict of Values:

There is a recommendation that the worship pastor has been given to us. He wants to buy a new piano and is going to cost “ \$X. ...”

Downward Spiral: *The Destructive steps we follow.*

1. **Disagreement:** Is it good for us to spend money or not.
2. **Competition (Conflict):** It is all about winning, how I see the money being spent.
3. **Destruction (Confrontation):** The focus now is to take down the other team member. Others are now viewed as a threat, one that needs to be removed.
4. **Adjustment:** In the destructive downward spiral one arrives at the place where teams divide, people remove friends from facebook, you can no longer relate the same with trust and respect.

II. 2 Carnal responses to conflict that lead us to Destructive Conflict. These are natural responses, when we yield to our sinful tendencies.



A. 2 Types of FLEEING:

1. PACIFIST

They think...

- (a) Conflict is Bad.
- (b) It is better to ignore it.
- (c) It will take care of itself .

2. AVOIDER

They think....

- (a) Conflict? What conflict?
- (b) I am willing to lie to avoid conflict.
- (c) I would rather diminish sin than confront it.



B. 2 Types of Fighters

1. DEFENDER

They think.....

- (a) The most important thing is to not change my position. I won't move!
- (b) I don't care who you are, I am not going to change.
- (c) I will justify my way to victory.

2. ATTACKER

They think....

- (a) They way to solve conflict is just win!
- (b) If I hurt you it is part of the process and not my fault.
- (c) It is all about power!

2 Men 2 Sinful Reactions to Conflict 2 Samuel 13-15.

Take time to read the 3 chapters and answer the following questions.

1. Name all the people involved in the story.
2. Identify the main conflict and the conflicts that flow out of it.
3. Next to each name of the all the participants in the different conflicts place the carnal response they gave.
4. What were the results of the different carnal responses and how did they affect the progression of the destructive conflict?

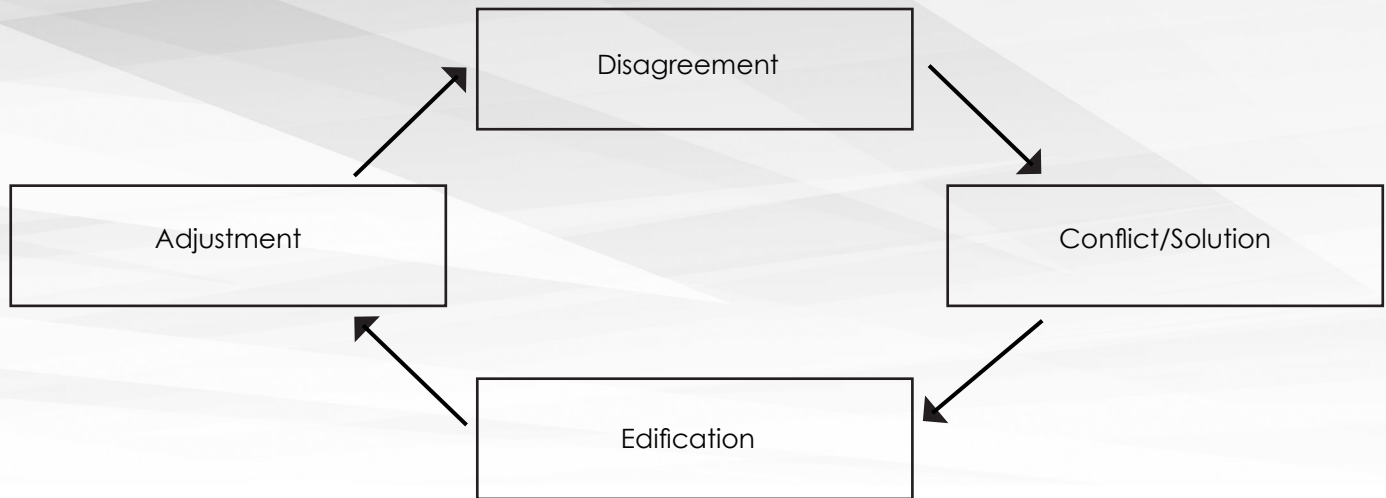
CONSTRUCTIVE CONFLICT

The constructive conflict refers to the conflict where the benefits outweigh the costs; they generate productive decisions, and are mutually beneficial. - Colette L. Meehan

Constructive Conflict occurs when one sees it as an opportunity to grow in their relationship with others.



I. Constructive Cycle:



1. DISAGREEMENT - (a) Opposition to value. (b) Emotions grow. (c) The focus of the problem is the issue.
2. CONFLICT/SOLUTION - Process to follow (a) Clarify the issue, (b) Permit the person to be respected and safe, (c) Listen Actively to the other person. James 1:19-20
3. EDIFICATION - (a) The relationship is built up. (b) Grace and Mercy are given, (c) Both parties move forward. Philippians 2:3-4
4. ADJUSTMENT - (a) The adjustment reflects restoration. (b) Both Parties move forward. I Thessalonians 5:15.

THINK ABOUT IT:

With Constructive Conflicts the process is just as important as the result. - Cameron Woolford

Without conflict we don't have change or growth. - Cameron Woolford

The conflict does not divide the churches ... however, the mishandling of the conflict is very destructive. Handled well, the conflict will mature us as we put into practice His divine love. Handled poorly, our selfishness will grow and kill Christian unity. - David Graef

II. 3 Key abilities to produce Constructive Conflict

1. **Clarify:** Make sure that every one understands all points of view and differences (OICA Method).
2. **Permit:** Make sure that each one feels that their views and values are valid.
3. **Active Listening:** Understand the meaning behind the words.



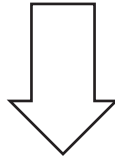
I. CLARIFY

O.I.C.A. Method

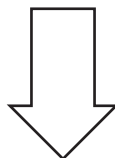
Observation - State exactly what you have observed



Interpretation - Explain how you interpret the information, keep an open mind to always give the benefit of the doubt to the other person.



Clarification - Give the other person the opportunity to clarify the matter. Look for alternative interpretations.



Accusation - With patience and love, show the other person how their behavior has been wrong.

2 Goals for Clarification

1. CORRECT my story: My wrong interpretation of the matter. In many cases you will not need to move towards accusation because clarifications clear things up and help to move towards a mutual resolution.
2. UNDERSTAND the position of the other person. This takes time and an ability to separate the issues from the person. Many times emotions keep us from truly understanding what the other person is trying to communicate.



II. PERMIT

3 Aspects of PERMIT:

1. Accept the legitimacy of the values and opinions of the other person. We need to help the other person feel that even if I disagree with them their their position is a legitimate one. We need to be careful not to communicate an attitude of condemnation or superiority but rather a true desire to understand.
2. Make the other person feel safe to share their values and opinions. If someone feels threatened because they feel personal attacked we can escalate the conflict.
3. Demonstrate Respect. We can demonstrate respect by giving a chance to the other person to speak and not interrupt. We can demonstrate respect by giving correct body language, not crossing our arms or making noised under our breath.

III. ACTIVE LISTENING

4 Aspects of Active Listening:

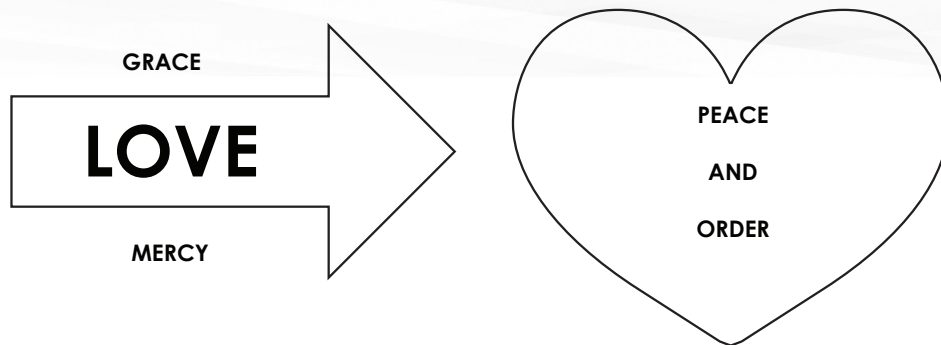
1. Give ATTENTION - Give full attention to the person that speaks, and examine the message. Recognize that the non-verbal communication also "talks" with a loud voice. Do not look down at the floor, seek to maintain eye contact. Don't just listen to the words but try to understand the emotions behind them.
2. DEMONSTRATE that you are listening - Use your body language and gestures to demonstrate its attention. Something as simple as crossing your arms can demonstrate you are not interested and are holding your position no matter what. Don't pick up or answer your cell phone or look at your compute during this time.
3. OFFER questions - Our filters, assumptions, judgments and beliefs can distort what we heard. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require that you reflect on what is being said and ask questions of clarification. Interaction and a real desire to understand through the asking of questions can demonstrate a real desire to understand and reconcile.
4. HOLD back judgement - To Interrupt is a waste of time, FRUSTRATES the person speaking and limits their full understanding of the message. Be very careful to jump to conclusions and not give the benefit of the doubt. The most important thing is that God is honored above all else even if means you have to humble yourself and your opinions.



GOSPEL CENTERED CONFLICT

The Gospel is the power that not only saved us, giving us new life in Christ, but is also the power that sustains us. It is the power by which we live each and every day as we walk in a world that is broken and under the rule of Satan. The Gospel brought you peace with God and order to your disorderly life. We must let that power do the same with our conflict. The Gospel should be evident in every area of our lives even in our conflicts!

2 Facets of LOVE: As we deal with conflict, we need to become experts in applying the truth of the gospel giving undeserved kindness – GRACE and not giving the other person what we think they deserve – MERCY



1. GRACE - EPHESIANS 2:8-9
2. MERCY - ROMANS 5:7-8

2 Heart Results:

1. PEACE - Philippians 2:7
2. ORDER - I Corinthians 14:33a

Following the example of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

1. We lose ourselves.
2. Elevate others.

Principles that help to ensure Constructive Conflict:

1. Live committed to one another
2. Values relationships, placing others first.
3. Celebrate diversity over conformity.
4. Learn how to build and maintain trust with others.



CHRISTIAN CONFRONTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

DO CONFLICTS DIVIDE CHURCHES?

Quick, One-question Quiz:

____ T or F Conflicts divide churches.

Answer: FALSE

The truth is...

1. Poor conflict MANAGEMENT divides churches.
2. Handled properly, conflict can be very HEALTHY for church growth.

Proverbs 27:17

As Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

When iron sharpens iron, sparks fly. There is friction and tension and heat. All of these forces can be used for DESTRUCTION, but in the right environment, they are ESSENTIAL for improvement.

A conflict-free church is a STAGNANT church, because no one is in anyone else's business.

3. It is our DUTY to confront.

Matthew 18:15

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.



I. CONFRONTATION AS AN ACT OF LOVE

Introduction:

Matthew 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself comes from Leviticus 19:18.

Leviticus 19:18

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

What's interesting about this verse is that it actually carries three commands: two negative commands and one positive.

(-) Do not SEEK REVENGE.

(-) Do not BEAR a GRUDGE.

(+) But love your neighbor as yourself.

These three commands are rolled together into one grammatical SENTENCE. The positive command is contrasted to the two negative commands by the word, "but." In other words, seeking revenge or bearing a grudge are two ways to show a LACK of love toward your neighbor.



A. 2 Ways to Show a Lack of Love

1. VIOLENCE - "Don't seek revenge."
2. SILENCE - "Don't bear a grudge."

B. What is Violence?

1. Violence can be PHYSICAL.
2. Violence can be VERBAL (emotional).
3. Violence can be SOCIAL (publicly make them look bad)



(It shows up in various forms...)

ATTACKING

INSULTING

LABELING

GOSSIPING

DOMINATING

INTIMIDATING

C. What is Silence?

Silence can be physical, verbal, or social as well.



(It shows up in various forms...)

AVOIDING

IGNORING

WITHDRAWING

WRITING PEOPLE OFF

OVERLOOKING



II. THE PROBLEM W/ SILENCE & VIOLENCE

A. Violence is like a TORNADO.

Violence, in all it's forms, is intended to TEAR PEOPLE down instead of BUILDING them up. The Scriptures has a lot to say about that!

Romans 14:19

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Romans 15:1-4

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

I Thessalonians 5:11

11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Since the word edify means "to build up," then tearing down is the exact opposite of how we should respond in love. Biblically, tearing someone down equals not loving them.

B. Silence is like an eroding FOUNDATION.

Many people seem to think that reacting in silence is actually GODLY. They pride themselves for holding back their desire to act out in aggression. However, foundational EROSION can destroy a house just as well as a tornado can!

Silence causes relational DIVISIONS. When those relationships crumble, so does everything the church is trying to accomplish. Consider the following verses regarding divisions in the church.

I Corinthians 1:10

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.



Colossians 2:2

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ...

Matthew 6:12

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

The Principle of the Watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-6)

The principle here is that when a person sees that a person is doing something wrong or offending God, it is his DUTY to warn them. If he sees and does not warn, then BLOOD is on his own HANDS.

Matthew 18:15

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.



III. THE GOAL OF CONFRONTATION

Genesis 3:11-13

11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

A. Our Natural Tendency: CAST BLAME

By nature, we humans have a hard time accepting blame. We saw this in our original ancestors (Adam and Eve), and JESUS pointed it out in the New Testament as well.

Matthew 7:3-5

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Verse 5 tells us that we need to replace our natural tendency to always blame others, and replace it with an honest SELF-EVALUATION.

Whereas we naturally notice the faults of others and ignore our own, Jesus tells us to examine our own faults BEFORE we attempt to help someone else recognize their faults. That is a radical concept which requires us to adopt an entirely new set of values!

B. Our New Values

1. The Value of UNITY.

Philippians 2:1-4

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

So if we are UNITED in Christ, then we should seek a UNITY of spirit with other believers. That means we value OTHERS over self.



2. The Value of COMMON GROUND.

By "common ground," we mean that each person is willing to value the thoughts and opinion of others. Then each person also has the opportunity to share his ideas, knowing they will be heard, understood, and evaluated with equal value. Consider the following proverb.

Proverbs 15:22

Without counsel, plans go awry, But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

Why a multitude of counselors? Because no one person has a MONOPOLY on wisdom! By nature, we need to have a place of common ground where multiple ideas, thoughts and opinions are shared EQUALLY and exhaustively.

3. The Value of LISTENING.

James 1:19

19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

Why does the Bible tell us this? Because by nature, we are not good listeners. Have you ever caught yourself thinking about what you were going to say, before the person with whom you were talking had finished speaking? Of course you have! We all have. If we want to handle conflicts well, we will have to fight our sinful natures and actually listen.

C. The Goal: MUTUAL EDIFICATION

Consider the verses we read on page 6 of the notes. Even in our conflicts, our goal ought to be to BUILD UP the person with whom I am having the conflict. When conflicts are handled improperly, it's usually because we have wrong goals.

1. It's not WINNING.

This might come as a shock to some, but the goal of a confrontation isn't to win the ARGUMENT. You can win arguments without winning PEOPLE. Matthew 18:15 makes it clear that the goal is to win the person, not the argument.

Matthew 18:15

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

2. It isn't REVENGE.

Romans 12:18-21

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



3. It isn't AVOIDANCE of conflict.

Some people just hate conflict, so they avoid it at all cost. A true friend though, is one who will confront when necessary.

Proverbs 27:5-6

5 Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

D. The Process

1. UNDERSTAND the other person.

Every person has their own unique set of opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences. According to James 1:19-20, my first goal should not be to convince someone to agree with my set of values, but rather to understand the values of the OTHER PERSON. When both parties act in this manner, the next step is easy.

2. Find the COMMON GROUND.

As you listen to others, look for ways to genuinely EMPATHIZE with their perspectives, even if you have a different one. Statements like "I can see why that would be important to you, but have you also considered from this other perspective?" seem to carry more weight than, "Who cares about X? I'm talking about Y!"

In the book, *Crucial Conversations*, they refer to this concept as "The Pool of Shared Meaning." The idea is that as you listen, you will begin to value other people's INSIGHTS and perspectives.

3. Seek Mutual EDIFICATION.

Once you are talking on common ground, you can talk about the differences that are harming the relationship.

Keep in mind that you should never attack the PERSON. Instead, together you attack the PROBLEM that is harming the relationship.

How do you do that? You have to have the right starting point.



IV. START WITH ME

A. Biblical Principles

1. A pure heart will result in GRACIOUS speech.

Proverbs 22:11

He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend.

2. We should PLAN what we say.

Proverbs 29:20

Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

3. We should plan what we WON'T say.

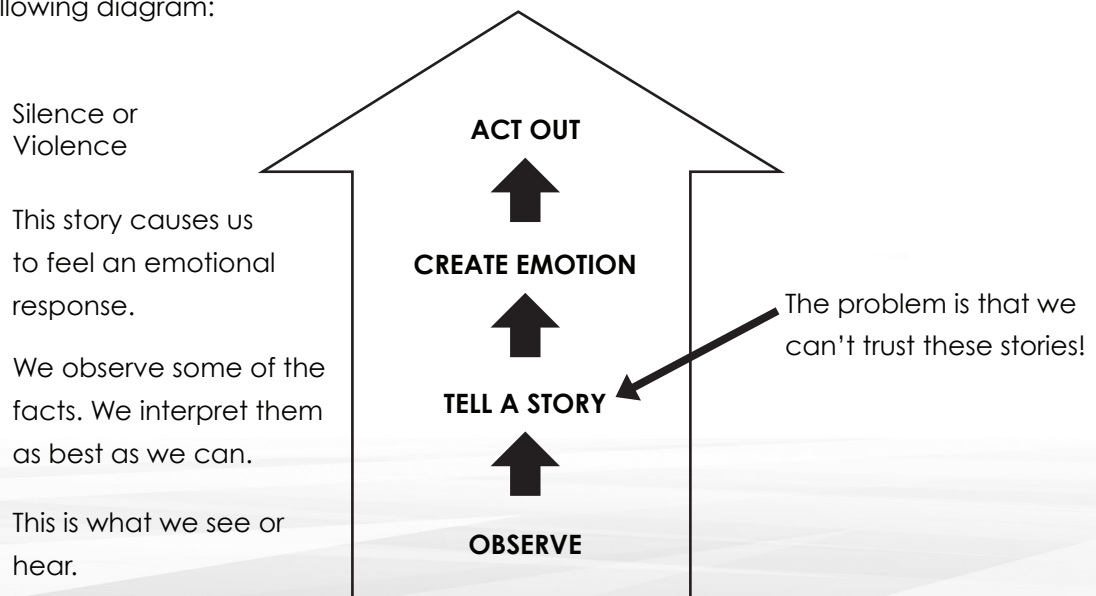
Proverbs 13:3

Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.

B. How Emotions Drive Our Actions

If we are going to be serious about a self-examination, then we have to know how our MINDS work in the event of a conflict. We need to understand that our actions are driven by our emotions. Have you ever responded to someone with silence or violence? Of course you have. Have you ever done so without any emotional stimulus? I doubt it.

Consider the following diagram:



Retracing my steps:

So if I'm going to start with me, I need to retrace my steps to see if I am acting out in silence or violence. So I ask myself a series of questions, walking backwards through the diagram.

1. Act out: Am I acting out in some sort of silence or violence?
2. Create Emotion: What EMOTIONS are making me act out this way?
3. Tell a Story: What STORY have I told myself that is making me act out this way?
4. Observe: Do the FACTS support this story?



V. TURNING EMOTIONS INTO CURIOSITY

A. Telling Yourself ALTERNATE Stories

The temptation is to let our emotions carry us to a CONCLUSION.



However, we must turn our negative emotions (frustration, anger, fear, etc.) into CURIOSITY.

How? By telling ourselves ALTERNATE stories.

This is called. "giving the BENEFIT of the DOUBT."

Deuteronomy 17:6

6 On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

Compare God's description of Job versus the description by his so-called "friends" (Job 1:1)

Job 1:1

1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.



B. The O.I.C.A. Method

In order to keep yourself from letting your negative emotions drive you to a premature conclusion about someone else's actions, there is a simple four-step process to remember. It is called, "The O.I.C.A. Method."

O = OBSERVATION

This is what I saw...

I = INTERPRETATION

This is what it looks like to me...

C = CLARIFICATION

Can you help me understand where I could be wrong?

A = ACCUSATION

Then what you did was wrong. How can I help you get back on track?

Examples:

1. Not returning a phone call

O = "You said you would call me, but you never did."

I = It seems to me that you lied... that you never were going to call me.

C = _____

2. Skipping church

O = "You told me you couldn't go to church because you were sick, but here you are in the mall 15 minutes after the service."

I = It seems to me that you made up that excuse... that you actually spent the whole time here in the mall.

C = _____



VI. ACCUSING WITH LOVE

Many times, the confrontation will end at the clarification stage. If the confrontation does get to the accusation stage, that does not give you license to DESTROY the person.

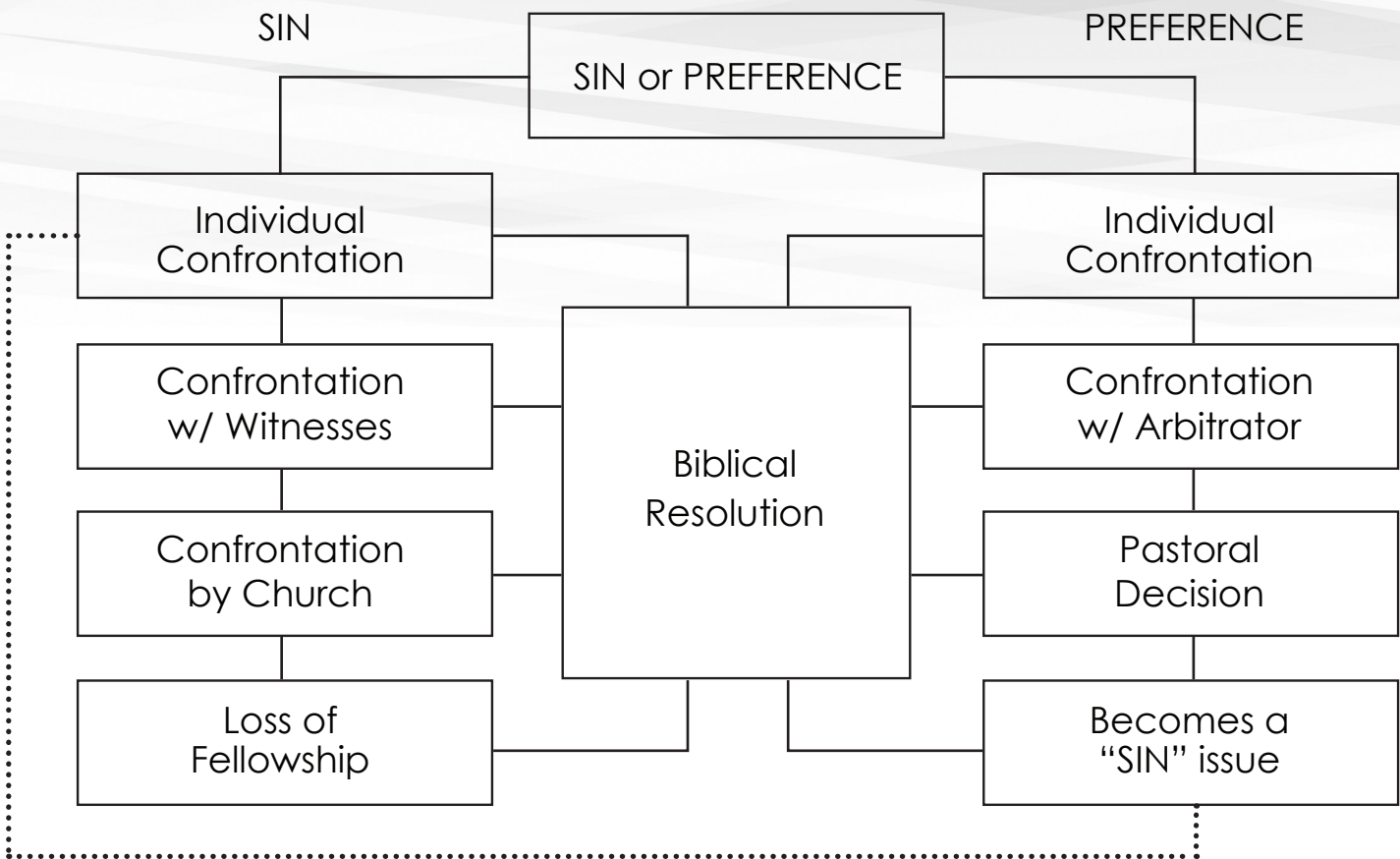
There is a balance we must maintain as we speak the TRUTH in LOVE. In the book, Crucial Conversations, they diagram it the following way in a section titled "Sharing Risky Meaning:"



1. The worst at dialogue will either RUDELY speak the truth (Quadrant I) or they will silently bear a GRUDGE (Quadrant II). That is, they vacillate between violence and silence.
2. The good at dialogue will vacillate between speaking the truth somewhat rudely (Quadrant I) and remaining silent (Quadrant III), not wanting to hurt the other person's feelings. That is, they vacillate between speaking and PROTECTING.
3. The best at dialogue will tell the ENTIRE truth, while being RESPECTFUL. They are totally sincere, and totally respectful.



VII. THE BIBLICAL PROCESS OF CORRECTION



Determining the Class of Conflict

Before addressing a conflict with another brother or sister in Christ, one should first determine what class of conflict it is. The biblical response to conflict will be determined by its class. There are two classes of conflicts found in Scripture that may come up in a church life setting. Both can be damaging if not handled biblically.

First, there are conflicts caused by SIN. Matthew 18 addresses this class of conflict directly.

Second, there are also conflicts that are caused by differences of PREFERENCE. That is, there are differences of opinion, desires, expectations, values, philosophies or directions. Paul writes extensively on this subject in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The above diagram is a summary of how we should handle each class of conflict. Please notice how in every case, there is always an option for biblical resolution. All roads lead to biblical resolution if we handle our conflicts biblically.



CLASS 1: Conflicts Caused by SIN

Phase 1: INDIVIDUAL Confrontation

The Bible makes it clear that when we see a brother in sin, we should go directly to him and lovingly show him his error. If he repents, we have won our brother!

The Bible says to go to him ALONE.

There are two important implications here. First, when we involve anyone outside the conflict (those who are not involved either as part of the problem or part of the solution), then we become guilty of gossip. That is very damaging to the unity of the church. Second, if we see the sin and choose not to confront, we are also guilty of disunity. We are not valuing our brother or sister's spiritual state enough to help him or her overcome the sinful behavior.

Remember, it is important to confront the person with the right attitude. To ensure you maintain a spirit of genuine interest in the other person, this is where you will employ the O.I.C.A. Method:

- (1) Observation - State what you have seen, heard or observed.
- (2) Interpretation - Explain how your mind interprets what you observed.
- (3) Clarification - Give the other person a chance to clarify the story.
- (4) Accusation - If necessary, lovingly show the person his or her fault.

Keep in mind that as brother in Christ, we owe each other the benefit of the doubt. If there is doubt, there should be freedom to investigate the situation, but until there is proof of sin, we should extend the grace of the benefit of the doubt.

If the other person repents in phase one, or if he or she clarifies the situation, then there is no need to continue to phase two. We owe it to the church body to drop the matter altogether and maintain a spirit of love and unity.

Phase 2: Confrontation with WITNESSES

One person's testimony is not enough to condemn a person. By adding two or three witnesses to the confrontation, we increase the likelihood of getting at the truth. Notice that this also limits the number of people involved, making it easier for the person in sin to admit his or her mistake without the pressure of thinking that an admission of guilt will make the sin more public than it needs to be.

If the other person repents in phase two, or if he or she better clarifies the situation, then there is no need to continue to phase three. Once again, we owe it to the church body to drop the matter altogether and maintain a spirit of love and unity.

Phase 3: Confrontation by the CHURCH

If it is clear that the brother or sister in question is still in sin, and has not repented, then it is time to involve the church pastoral leadership. The pastoral leadership will determine how much information will be divulged to the congregation, and the congregation will be given a time period in which they will be encouraged to reach out to the accused person.

The hope is that the person will respond in repentance. If so, the brother should be relationally restored, and the pastoral leadership may require some steps of action to edify that brother or sister.



Phase 4: Loss of FELLOWSHIP

If the accused, after having passed through all three phases, refuses to repent, then he or she should be expelled from the church membership.

The Bible clearly says that we should treat that person as an UNSAVED person. What does that mean? Church members should no longer treat him or her as a brother in Christ. We do not talk to them as if they were right with God.

This is not SHUNNING. Shunning is to pretend that the person does not exist. The Bible says that we treat them as unbelievers. So how do we treat unbelievers? We try to reach them! The goal of every conversation is to restore them to a right relationship with God. If we act as if they are already right with God, they are less likely to recognize their sin, so biblical expulsion is actually an act of mercy. The desire is still to see the person repent and be restored.

One important thing to note: The size of the sin (on a human scale) is never a consideration when it comes to relational restoration to the church. It is the willingness to repent when confronted that matters in the process.

CLASS 2: Conflicts Caused by Differences of Preference

Phase 1: INDIVIDUAL Confrontation

In many cases, phase one isn't even necessary. If there is a difference of preference that you can overlook without any negative residual sentiments, there is not a problem with learning to IGNORE the conflict. If however, the conflict is causing any emotional detachment toward a brother or sister in Christ, then it should be addressed.

As in phase one of the other class of conflict, we should go directly to the person with whom we have the conflict and address the issue alone. There is no need to involve other people in the conflict. This too is gossip.

Again it is also important to confront the person with the right attitude, so to ensure you maintain a spirit of genuine interest in the other person, you should follow the following three steps:

(1) IDENTIFY the issue.

Let the other person know that he or she is important to you, and that you do not want any preference issues to come between you in the relationship. Kindly explain what behavior has become an obstacle in the relationship and why?

(2) LISTEN to the other person.

Sometimes, just hearing the heart behind another person's behavior is enough for us to change our perspective on the behavior itself. If not, at least we will know where the other person is coming from.

(3) Seek a MUTUAL agreement.

A mutual agreement is a solution accepted by both parties. After hearing each other's sides, either party may choose to bend for the sake of the other, or there may be an agreeable compromise. In any case, if both parties agree to it, then the matter is solved. If a mutual agreement cannot be obtained, proceed to Phase 2.



Phase 2: Confrontation with an ARBITRATOR

There is no shame in asking for help with a relational issue. The two parties should agree upon asking a mutually trusted person to assist them in the process of seeking a mutual agreement. (If the two parties cannot agree, then skip straight to Phase 3.) The arbitrator will calmly oversee the conversation, helping each side see the issues of the other. He or she will help them find an agreeable solution. If a mutual agreement is still not maintained, then proceed to Phase 3.

Phase 3: PASTORAL Decision

If the conflict is still not resolved, then the parties should seek pastoral oversight of the conflict. The pastor(s) involved will listen, understand and evaluate the opinions of both parties. An agreement will be made by the pastoral leadership and both members should be willing to submit to that decision. If one or both parties are unwilling to submit to pastoral leadership at that point, then that will change the class of the conflict. It is no longer an issue of preference, but an issue of sin.



VIII. WHEN THEY ARE IN THE WRONG

Now, we've talked about what to do if you are reacting with violence or silence, but what should you do if the other person is reacting with violence or silence?

A. How to Recognize Crucial Conversations

1. PHYSICAL SIGNS
2. EMOTIONS
3. BEHAVIORAL CONDUCT

B. The Two Threats (that cause silence or violence)

When a person responds with silence or violence, that means the lines of communication have been damaged. Don't waste your breath continuing the conversation until the lines have been repaired! Here are the two threats that cause silence or violence:

1. Perceived lack of mutual RESPECT.

Some good investigative questions to ask yourself are...

- a. Is he being defensive?
- b. Is he taking things personally?
- c. Is he attacking me personally?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, there is a good chance that the other person feels threatened by a lack of mutual respect.

2. Perceived lack of mutual GOALS.

Some good investigative questions to ask yourself are...

- a. Does he seem overly emotional?
- b. Is he drawing a line in the sand?
- c. Is he building arguments without listening to your ideas?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, there is a good chance that the other person feels threatened by a lack of mutual goals.



C. Questions to Help Reach Solutions

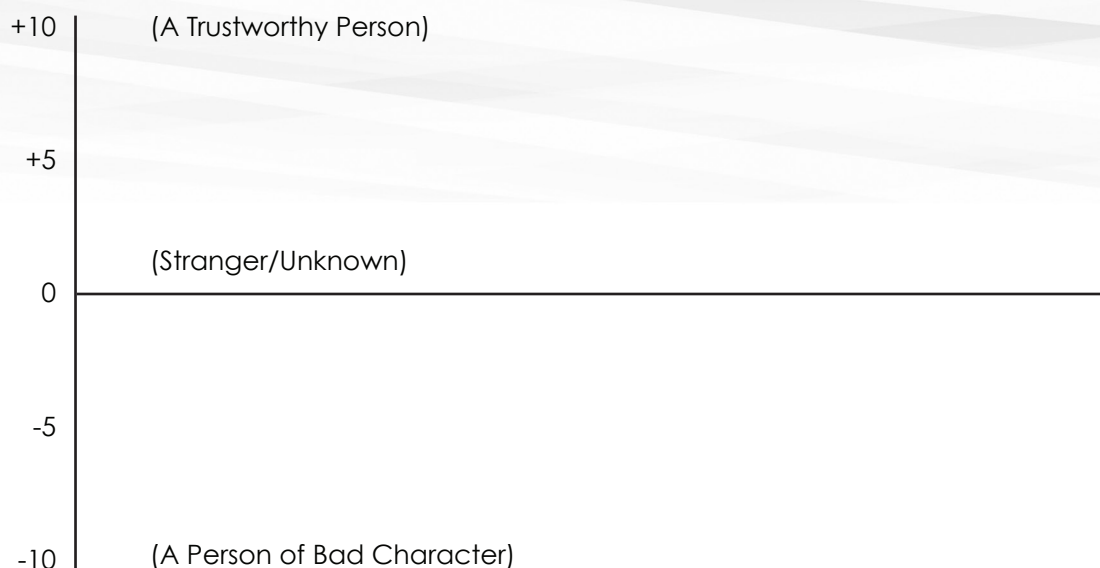
1. Perceived lack of mutual respect.
 - a. Do I respect this person?
 - b. Does this person BELIEVE I respect him?
 - c. How can I SHOW him that I respect him?
2. Perceived lack of mutual goal.
 - a. Do I care about this person's concerns?
 - b. Does he BELIEVE I care?
 - c. How can I SHOW him that I care?



IX. FORGIVENESS & RESTORATION

Level of Trust:

If we were to measure our level of trust using a vertical scale from -10 to +10, with 0 being in the exact middle, then it should look something like this:



The higher the level of trust, the higher the positive number will be. Conversely, the higher the level of distrust, the higher the negative number will be. A "0" then, would be a complete STRANGER - someone you neither trust nor distrust.

As you give small opportunities for someone to show himself trustworthy, he can slowly work his way to being a +10, or "a TRUSTWORTHY person."

Conversely, if a person betrays your trust, with time and repetition, he can reach a -10, or "a person of bad CHARACTER." (At least, in your opinion.)

This is how we evaluate a person's trustworthiness by nature, but is this how we should evaluate people?

Jesus spoke of forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-22.



Matthew 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

So what does this mean? Does that mean that every time a person asks for forgiveness, even if it is a repetitive pattern of untrustworthiness, we should restore them to a perfect +10?

Forgiveness

Read the following verses about forgiveness.

Prov. 27:11-13

Prov. 25:19

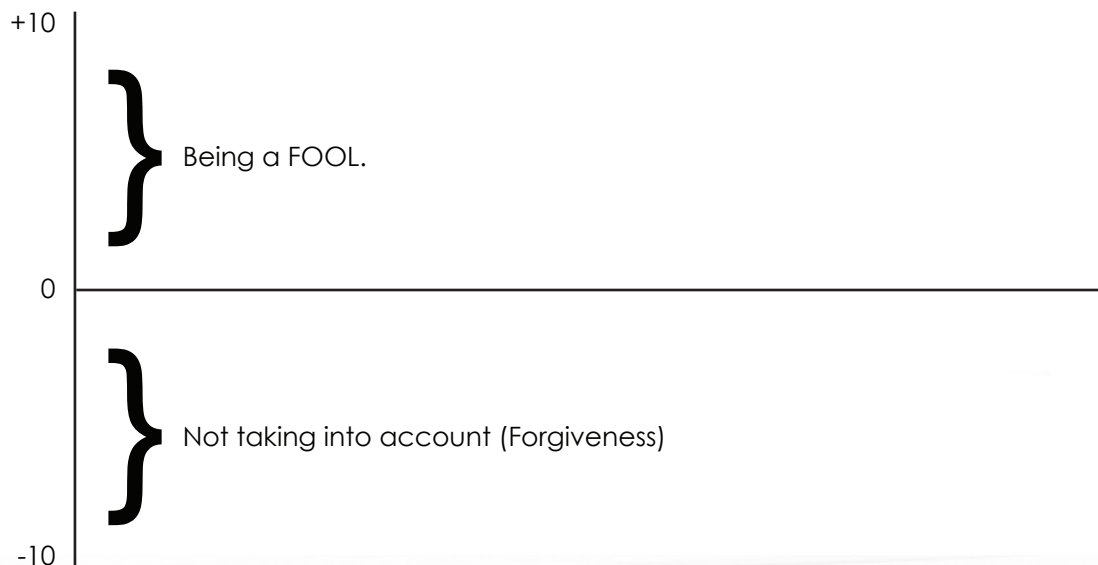
Job 15:15-16

Ps. 40:4

Ps. 118:8-9

Jer. 9:4

1. Forgiveness does not equal BLIND trust.
2. Forgiveness is not taking into account what has been FORGIVEN.
3. It is restoring a person to a "0," giving him another opportunity to WIN your trust.



X. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A. I observe an action that BOTHERS me.

1. I ask myself, "Is this a sin issue or a preference issue?"
2. Follow the course of action in The Biblical Process of Correction.

B. I start with ME.

1. I review my heart ATTITUDE.
 - Am I acting out in Silence or Violence?
 - What emotions are making me act out this way?
 - What story have I told myself that is making me feel this way?
 - Do the facts support this story?
3. I review my goals.
 - Do I really want mutual edification?
 - Or do I want to win the argument?
 - Am I seeking revenge?
4. I turn negative emotions into CURIOSITY.
 - I give the benefit of the doubt.
 - I tell myself ALTERNATE stories.

C. I decide to CONFRONT, using O.I.C.A.

1. This is what I OBSERVED.
2. This is how I INTERPRETED it.
3. Could you help me CLARIFY my observations?



The confrontation may end here, but let's assume the other person responds with silence or violence.

D. I repair the lines of COMMUNICATION.

1. I make sure we have a mutual GOAL.

- Do I care about this person's concerns?
- Does he believe I care?
- How can I show him that I care?

2. I make sure we have mutual RESPECT.

- Do I respect this person?
- Does this person believe I respect him?
- How can I show him that I respect him?

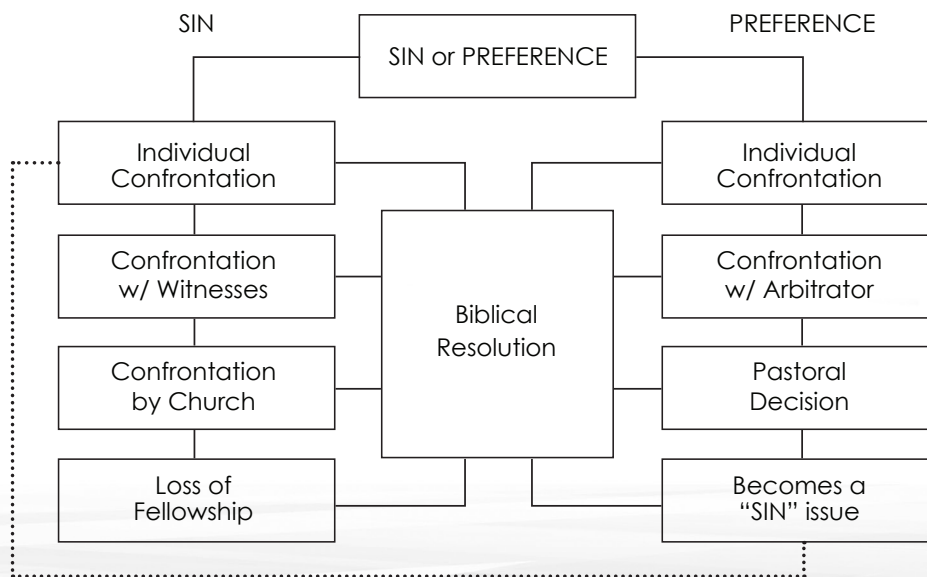
E. We come to a mutual AGREEMENT.

1. It can be a RESOLUTION.

2. It can be a PLAN OF ACTION. (Following The Biblical Process of Correction.)

F. We follow the PLAN.

Notice that in God's plan, ALL routes end with a Biblical Resolution! If we stick to God's plan, we will be able to resolve a world of conflicts, and grow through the process!



FIREPROOFING YOUR CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: What is a firestorm?

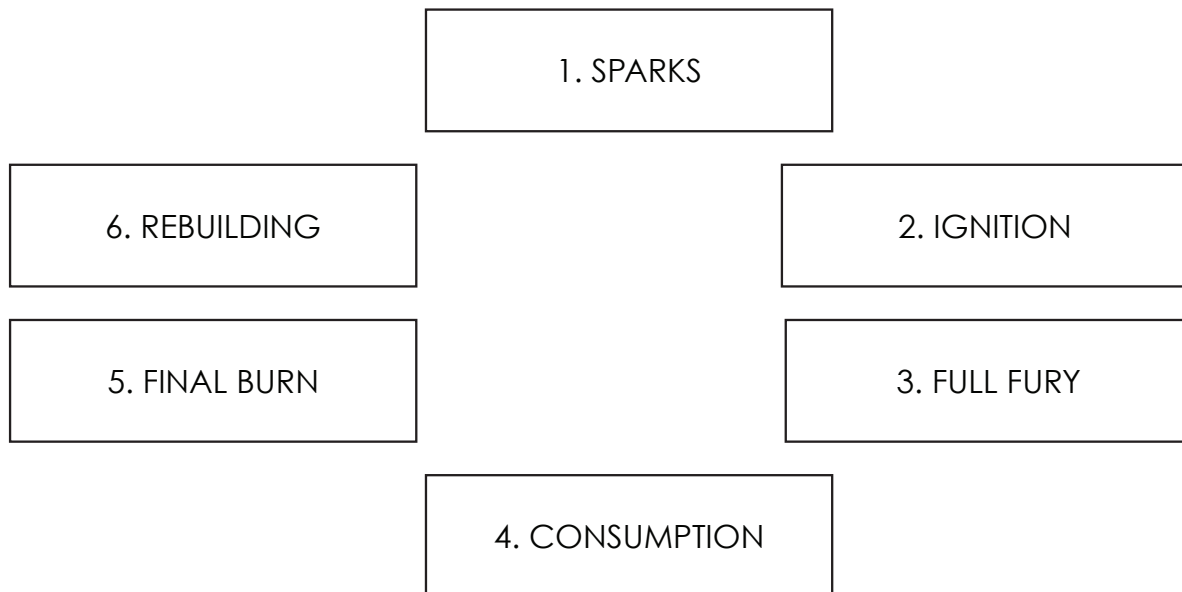
We have all seen the devastation of firestorms; if not in person, at least through pictures or videos. Buildings and monuments that took years to erect are turned to ashes in mere minutes. The power and fury of a firestorm is an awesome thing to behold, but we hope we never have to.

Just as there are literal firestorms that can destroy years of work, there are figurative firestorms that can do just as much damage. They can destroy years of work and preparation. A short lesson in recent church history will show that some churches have seemed to be thriving one minute... and turned to proverbial ash the next.

How does that happen? What causes them to ignite? Is there a way to prevent them?

These are the questions we will be answering in this course.

The 6 Phases of a Firestorm



1. Sparks:
SMALL CONFLICTS, DISAGREEMENTS BASED ON DIFFERING VALUES, OPINIONS, ETC.
2. Ignition:
OTHERS GET INVOLVED, START RECRUITING PEOPLE TO THEIR SIDE, ETC.
3. Full Fury:
ALL SIDES START GETTING VOCAL. PEOPLE ATTACK CHARACTER OVER ISSUES. CONFLICTS BECOME PUBLIC.
4. Consumption:
RELATIONSHIPS ARE PERMANENTLY DAMAGED, PEOPLE LEAVE. VISITORS DO NOT RETURN, ETC.
5. Final Burn:
THERE IS ONLY A CORE GROUP REMAINING, TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH.
6. Rebuilding:
WOUNDED, BUT HOPEFUL. STARTING FROM SCRATCH.

Whereas this course is about fireproofing your church, we will focus on only two of these six phases: (1) Sparks, and (2) Ignition. The goal is to help you create an environment where proverbial sparks do not ignite into destructive flames.

Phase 1: SPARKS

True or False?

___ Conflicts divide churches.

Answer: FALSE

CONFLICTS never divide churches. Not dealing properly with conflict does!

Conflicts are like SPARKS. There is friction between a force with momentum moving in one direction against a similar momentum moving in the opposite direction. That is the nature of sparks. It is also the nature of conflicts. But are sparks always bad?

Proverbs 27:17 says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."*

If you have ever watched iron sharpening iron, it is hard to imagine without sparks. In fact, if there are no sparks, it is a sign that there is not enough friction to sharpen anything! So it is with the church. If there are no conflicts, there is no spiritual growth.

Let's get real practical here. Some churches have developed a philosophy that the best way to have peace in the church is to organize away any potential of conflict and to congregate primarily with people like you. This idea is usually supported by what is often called the "Homogenous Unit Principle", or "HUP" for short.

The idea is this: People tend to get along with others like themselves, so the key to creating a peaceful church environment is to create target groups so that churches are comprised of similar or like-minded people. Whether one believes this philosophy consciously or not, it is the default setting for church attendance.



The problem with HUP is not in its observation of reality, but rather in its application. It is true that people tend to hang around others who look, act, and think like they do. In fact, those who have studied the HUP have concluded this idea with statistical evidence to support the claim. They call it the "70/30 Principle." That is, 70% of the people with whom you spend time, are like you in any given area. For example, if you are African American, it is likely that 70% or more of the people you talk to today will also be African American. If you are a Republican, chances are 70% of the people you talk to today will share your political bias. If you are a male, 70% of the people you talk to will be male. If you are a Christian, same thing; and so on. It's a complicated logarithm, but the evidence supports it, and it does no use to deny it.

The problem with the Homogenous Unit Principle comes in how the church has applied it. We have designed our churches based on target groups so that we never have to work through conflicts. Then when a conflict does arise, we are not spiritually mature enough to know how to deal with those conflicts in love. We set ourselves up with the false expectation that everyone should agree with everyone else, and we make a fuss when we do not get our way, like a spoiled child whose mother has to drag him out of a toy store.

We must come to agree with the biblical conclusion that conflict is GOOD! It is even necessary! But poorly handled, it can be extremely DANGEROUS as well.

So when are sparks useful and when are they dangerous?

1. Sparks are useful when they make us SHARPER, better equipped for our job.

Conflicts, like sparks, are useful when they sharpen us. The sparks caused by the sharpening process will increase the capability of the axe it sharpens. When I look back at the top ten points of spiritual growth in my life, I can say that all of them were sparked by some form of conflict. Let's face it. Without conflict, we are not motivated to CHANGE. Without change, we never GROW.

2. Sparks are dangerous when we do not carefully prepare the environment, and they ignite a flame that goes out of control.

Again, if I were to consider my top ten points of spiritual paralyzation, my top ten "wounds" so-to-speak, all of them were ignited by conflicts as well.

So conflicts can be useful, or they can be dangerous. It all depends on the environment. For example, if you decided to sharpen your axe in a hay barn, that would not be a good idea. Hay is quite flammable and once it ignites, your barn will turn to a heap of ruins in minutes. So a wise farmer would sweep the environment, and make sure there are no flammable materials around. A foolish farmer will make one of two possible mistakes. He will either (a) decide that he should not sharpen his axe, and waste his energy by chopping a tree with a dull axe, or (b) he will sharpen the axe in a flammable environment and ignite a firestorm. Let us be wise and learn to prepare the environment for useful sparks. Let's create churches that know how to have resolve conflicts without igniting a firestorm.



To do this, we will look at 4 causes of Firestorms, so that we can wisely keep the sparks from igniting.

Phase 2: IGNITION

Let's look at the 3 main causes of Firestorms, and the biblically appropriate way to create an environment for sparks without igniting a fire.

Cause #1: PYROMANIACS

A pyromanic is someone who enjoys starting fires. They get excited by the drama created by the flames. They will often catch buildings on fire just so that they can watch them burn to the ground. It is a sickening disorder, but very real.

There are spiritual pyromaniacs in our churches as well. They love to stir up conflict and watch relationships burn to the grounds. They are addicted to the drama of it.

The Scriptures describe pyromaniacs, too.

Proverbs 10:12

12 Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

Proverbs 6:12-15

12 A troublemaker and a villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, 13 who winks maliciously with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, 14 who plots evil with deceit in his heart - he always stirs up conflict. 15 Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed without remedy.

I think we get the picture; probably because we have all observed pyromaniacs in our own churches. So what should we do with them? What is the solution?

Consider what the writer of Hebrews teaches us in the following verses:

Hebrews 12:14-15

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

So the first step is to make sure that we are not the pyromaniacs! Pyromaniacs do not hold peaceful interaction high on their list of priorities. According to Hebrews 12, the goal is to learn to live in peace with everyone!

Here, the writer of Hebrews also reminds us that there are limits. It is not possible to live in peace with everyone, all the time. If we allow bitterness to spread in the church, for example, it will defile many. So as leaders in our churches, at times we must protect our people from the growing bitterness caused by spiritual pyromaniacs.



Consider the words of the Apostle Paul:

Romans 16:17-18

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.

Wow! We are not only warned to watch out for them, but to keep away from them! We must draw a line of SEPARATION between those who are part of the church, and those who are only there to serve their own appetite for creating drama.

Solution to Pyromaniacs: HEALTHY CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The solution to spiritual pyromania in the church, is to have a healthy process for church discipline.

Titus 3:9-11

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. 11 You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are selfcondemned.

Discipline is not synonymous with *expulsion*. Expulsion is the last step of church discipline only in the case when a person has refused to repent at every earlier step. The pyromaniac has been given his multiple warnings and refuses to repent. At this point, it is better to remove his or her status of fellowship in order to protect the others from the damage of a contagious bitterness in the church.

The Process of Healthy Church Discipline:

So what is the process of healthy church discipline? Jesus answers that for us in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:15-18

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Here, we see 5 Steps clearly laid out for us.

Step 1: Determine if it is a SIN issue.

"Moreover if your brother sins against you..." The word "if" here implies that there is a condition to be met in the steps that follow. The issue must clearly be an issue between right and wrong. Make sure that preference issues do not creep into this process.



Step 2: Individual CONFRONTATION

The phrase "...between you and him alone" implies that you do not involve any uninvolved parties. A good rule of thumb is: If a person is not a part of the problem, nor a part of the solution, he should not be part of the conversation.

Step 3: Confrontation with WITNESSES

"But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more..."

This step only takes place if the brother does not repent. The fact that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy here implies that it is important to have witnesses of the confrontation present, and witnesses of the sin if possible.

Step 4: Confrontation by CHURCH

"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church..."

Notice that there are varying degrees of the spread of information. In Step 2, there are only two people involved. In Step 3, a few more are added. Step 4 is the first step that goes public. The whole church hears about the sin and the stubbornness of the person who refuses to repent. The church is given the opportunity to confront the pyromaniac and plead with him or her to change their ways.

Step 5: Loss of FELLOWSHIP

"But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." At this point, the relationship changes. Where there was once a sense of fellowship and comradeship, now the relationship retrocedes to what it was before the person claimed to have become a believer.

It is important to note that this is very unlike SHUNNING. Shunning is a complete loss of relationship. That is never called for in Scripture. There is only a loss of FELLOWSHIP. Notice that Jesus said we should treat them as heathens or tax collectors. How do we treat heathens and tax collectors? Do we ignore them? No. Do we hate them? Absolutely not! But we also do not treat them like we are both equally in a state of fellowship, working together on the same goals. How do we treat heathens? We love them. We try to win them over. That is how Jesus describes the way we should treat a person under this phase of church discipline.

Cause #2: PRAGMATISM

What is Pragmatism?

Simply put, pragmatism is when we focus on what WORKS instead of what is COMMANDED.

Pragmatism creates a very flammable environment for conflicts. Everyone has their own ideas of what success looks like for the church, and when other people start moving in a different direction, that causes some emotional sparks.

Imagine trying to play a game of football, but with undefined end zones. Your running back may start running in one direction, and you cry out, "Hey! Not that way! This way!" To which he responds, "No! I think it's this way!" It would make no sense.



In churches, we have seen pragmatism cause an endless amount of conflict, without having a clear measurement by which to evaluate the validity of either side's opinion or preference.

For example, to some churches, the only standard of success is NUMERICAL growth. In fact, this is the default mode of most pragmatic churches. They make decisions based upon the pragmatic results. If it will get more people in the door, we will do it. Doctrine gets watered down. Expectations of spiritual life-change decrease. "But hey, at least we are filling the pews!"

3 Types of Church Growth

You see, there are three types of church growth:

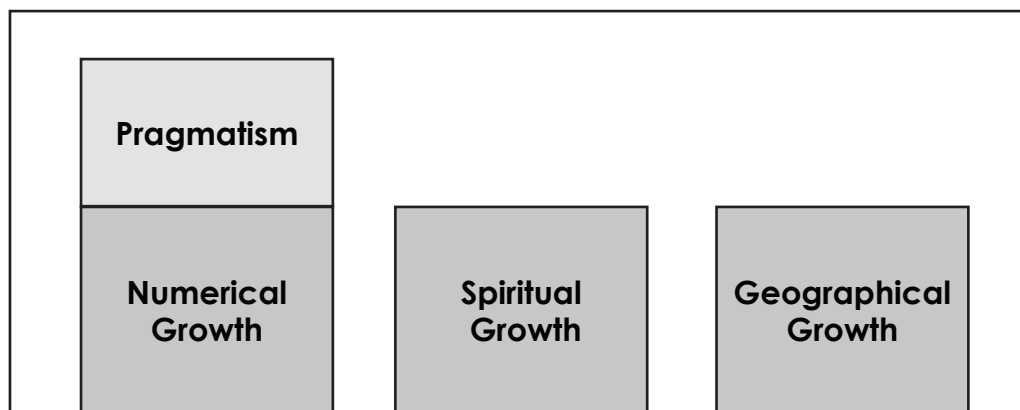
A. NUMERICAL Growth

B. SPIRITUAL Growth

C. GEOGRAPHICAL Growth

Numerical growth is marked simply by an increase in attendance. *Spiritual growth*, which is harder to measure, would be marked by relationship advancements between the congregants and God, as well as positive changes in behaviors that result. *Geographical growth* would be marked by a widening sphere of influence. Examples of geographical growth would be such things as (a) adding satellite sites, (b) starting a TV or radio program, (c) having outreach events in new neighborhoods, (d) starting a church plant, (e) supporting missionaries, and (f) sending missionaries.

Ideally, a church grows in all three areas simultaneously. That is a healthy type of growth. A quick read of the book of Acts will show us that the early church thrived when all three of these were happening at the same time.



Pragmatism, however, usually focuses on NUMERICAL growth alone. This is extremely FLAMMABLE. We read about the results of this in Ron Susek's book, *Firestorm*. The numerical growth was great, but the moment that conflict arose, the whole thing burned to the ground.

Solution to Pragmatism: GOSPEL MISSION

How do we avoid all this mess? By clearly defining the end zone. We define the mission that sets the church in a uniformed direction, headed toward the same goal. Fortunately for us, Jesus already gave us that mission.



Matthew 28:19-20

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

The Gospel Mission is to make disciples of Christ. We evangelize them. We baptize them. We train them to be more obedient to Christ. That's it! It's that simple, but we oftentimes over-complicate it.

Pragmatism will often pit the METHODS against the MESSAGE. What do I mean by that? I mean that we lose our balance. On one hand, we should be pragmatic. Why would we use a method that is ineffectively communicating the message? Yet, if we lean too far toward pragmatism, then we change the message in order to make it more palatable for people.

Imagine a scientist who travels to a remote part of the world and discovers that an entire village is drinking contaminated water. So he rounds up as many people as he can and he tries to explain to them that there are contaminants in the water that are causing them to get sick. At first, the villagers look at him with blank stares. This concept of contaminants is foreign to them. Maybe they had even been taught that sicknesses were brought on by their local deities, so any concept of bacteria or germs made no sense at all to them. The end result is that they walk away unchanged, continuing to drink the contaminated water. And the scientist is unable to muster people together to even talk about the issue.

Now imagine that the scientist chooses not give up. He knows that no one will listen to his message about contamination, so he decides to change his message. Instead of telling them that their water is contaminated, he offers them an alternative source of water... bottled water! He has water for sale which he offers at a small price and it tastes better! What he does not tell them is that he is filtering the water himself before selling it to them. They may not get the message, but at least they start drinking clean water.

Sounds great, right? Pragmatic even! But here's the problem. The contaminated water is free. It is readily available. Without understanding the message, the villagers will continue to drink water from the contaminated source.

Churches are doing the same thing. In attempts to make the message more palatable, they are changing the message. Studies show that people do not like to be told they are sinners, so churches have come to accept blatant sin as... well, acceptable. The Apostle Paul condemned the church in Corinth for that!

I Corinthians 5:1-2

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Certainly, this was not very pragmatic! Why lose a titing congregant? Here's why:

Because keeping him watered down the message!

Churches are constantly distorting clearly taught doctrines in order to better relate to the fallen world around them. Many churches now even deny the existence of hell, the sinfulness of sex outside of marriage, the literal creation of the universe by God, etc.



So as church leaders, we must be careful how we maintain the balance between being pragmatic and being a full-fledged pragmatist. The key to maintaining that balance is to focus on the gospel mission. We define our success by our compliance with Christ's command to make disciples. A pew sitter is not a disciple. Only one who begins to obey the teachings of Christ is a disciple.

Diagnostic Questions:

Here are two diagnostic questions that should help us deal with conflicts that result from pragmatism.

1. Is there anything short of sin that we could do as a church to help people better understand our message?

If so, do it!

Going back to the analogy of the scientist, perhaps he should not have changed the message, but merely change the way he communicated it. Perhaps he could have described bacteria as "little bugs that are so tiny that you can't see them." Perhaps he could show them how a microscope works. Maybe he could show them what those "bugs" look like. This would be way better than changing the message altogether.

2. By making a pragmatic change, are we watering down the message?

In the world of pragmatics, there is a lot of speculation. One person may think that the worship service should look like a Christian rock concert in order to attract more people while another believes it will drive more people away. One person may think that when a church reaches the limit of their building, they should start a new church, while another thinks they should sell the building and buy something bigger. These kinds of questions, if left to speculation, create an extremely flammable environment. However, when we work off the same orders, we have an objective North by which to judge the success or failure of the church.

Balancing Evangelism and Edification:

Another advantage of a Gospel Mission focus is that the church will at least try to maintain a balance between evangelism and edification. By evangelism, I am referring to the processes by which the church communicates the gospel to unbelievers. Edification is the process by which a person who has responded to the gospel in faith will grow in his or her relationship with God.

When we focus on obedience to the mission, we maintain both in a state of equal tension. Yes, we seek to make and baptize disciples (evangelism), but we hold in equal tension the task to teach those disciples to obey everything Christ commanded (edification.) Any church that focuses only on one of the two is doomed to have sparks turn into ignition.



Table Talk:

How might a church that focuses on evangelism to the exclusion of edification doom itself to fail?

How might a church that focuses on edification to the exclusion of evangelism doom itself to fail?

Cause #3: PREFERENCES

If there is one thing that has wrongly caused divisions in the church, it is over-valuing our preferences. That is, one party prefers one thing while another prefers something else, whether it is the style of worship, the times of the services, who gets which room, or who serves in what capacity. We divide over such things even though Christ calls us to UNITY.

Before the church's inception, Christ prayed that the church would be unified.

John 17:20-23

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. So the church is called to keep this unity.

Ephesians 4:1-6

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

How many times do we read the word "one" in this passage? Why? Because there is so much that we have in common that we should have no problem staying unified.

Unity does not equal UNIFORMITY. Unity takes our differences into account. In fact, it capitalizes upon our differences to move us in a singular direction. Uniformity means that all parties are alike.



I once met with a couple that was struggling with the pastoral staff's decision to allow guitars and drums in the worship. The husband made a statement like, "I know there is nothing biblically wrong with guitars or drums, but I just don't like them. What's wrong with having our own church for people like me, and letting them have their own church for people like them?"

The answer to his question is: EVERYTHING! What he sought was uniformity instead of unity. The idea was that uniformity would create a more peaceful, conflict-free church. The reality is that we need those conflicts. For him, learning to put up with some modern music that honors God, for the sake of his brothers in Christ, was a spiritual exercise that he desperately needed to put into practice. He needed it in order to grow! The same was true for some of the other couples who needed to put up with some of the more traditional hymns for the sake of their brothers in Christ who were truly blessed by them. Both sides, had they mistaken uniformity as unity, would have lost out on an opportunity to put love into action. We need those conflicts to grow!

So why is uniformity so dangerous? Because DIVERSITY is an essential ingredient to unity.

Consider what the Apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Christ values our differences. Likewise, we should learn to value the differences in others. For this reason, methods will change, but our message must not!

Solution to Preferences: INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY

So what's the solution to conflicts caused by preferences? The theological answer to that is called "Individual Soul Liberty."

The idea behind Individual Soul Liberty (ISL) is that we as Christians are all unified by the same authority: The Bible - God's inspired Word. So where the Bible speaks with clarity, we are unified in submission to it. Where it is not, we allow each other the freedom to apply the Scriptures according to their own understanding.

This is a biblical doctrine that the apostles left us so that we could maintain unity in the church. Look at what Paul wrote to the churches in Rome.

Romans 14:1-5

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.



By using the term, "doubtful things," we can see that Paul is not talking about clear teachings of Scripture. Our example of I Corinthians 5 would be an example of that, when Paul condemned them for accepting blatant sexual sin in the church. Paul is saying here that when it comes to disputable matters, we do not judge those who disagree with us. Period.

Imagine how fireproof our churches would be if we taught then the doctrine of Individual Soul Liberty! Imagine if each member understood that he does not have the right to throw a stink, simply because he did not get his way. In fact, he would need to build an argument from Scripture that to do otherwise would be sin! Preference-related conflicts would simply get him back into the Word, where he should have been all along!

Example: How we dress for church

Again, let's get real practical. Let's take a potentially divisive preference issue and wrestle it to the ground. How about...how we dress for church.

Take a look at the four men below. With who do you identify yourself the most?

Ferris E. Mann	Luke N. Good	Will B. Humble	Ben N. Trubble
I dress to show respect to God, and I expect others to do the same. In my church, I expect you to show up looking nice. Anything less is disrespectful to God.	I tend to dress up by nature, so I naturally dress up on Sundays to show respect to God. It's not a 'conviction' per se, but I wish more would dress up like me or Ferris.	I think people tend to dress up only when they're trying to get attention, so I usually dress casual for church. That way I can focus on God and not on getting compliments on how I dress.	I think dressing up is for old fogies and legalists. If we're gonna reach the world, we gotta be hip. If your'e gonna come to my church, leave the tie at home.



Let's assume that all four are genuine believers, and they are in various stages of their spiritual maturity. Remember, we are called to receive one who is weak in the faith. So with this in mind, let's ask ourselves some questions.

1. What are some of the positive (top line) and negative (bottom line) characteristics of each person?

Ferris E. Mann	Luke N. Good	Will B. Humble	Ben N. Trubble
+ Respects God + Very disciplined in how he shows his respect.	+ He respects God, and shows it by how he dresses. + He does not consider a preference issue to be at the same level as a conviction.	+ Humble + Not seeking attention	+ Zealous for God + Tends to be more evangelistic
- Judgmental - Assumes that all people dress up to show respect, while some see dressing up as a way to get attention.	- He has to be careful not to create an atmosphere where Will and Ben feel uncomfortable.	- He has to be careful not to create an atmosphere where Ferris and Luke feel uncomfortable.	- Judgmental - Assumes that all people who dress up do so to get attention, while some dress up to show respect.

2. With whom do you most easily identify? _____

3. If your answer is Ferris or Luke, then what questions should you ask yourself before assuming that Will or Ben do not respect God? And if your answer is Will or Ben, then what questions should you ask yourself before assuming that Ferris or Will are simply dressing to get attention?

4. How can answering #3 help you to keep the unity in the church? How can both sides grow through this process?

