

Lesson 1

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Purposes of study:

- To help understand that conflict can be a reality in ministry
- To examine examples of conflict in scripture
- To identify some main areas of conflict in ministry
- To examine some ways of handling conflicts
- To highlight some related issues of stress, anger and burnt-out

LESSON OUTLINE

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 - B. Conflict is always a reality in Church
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- B. Identify the issues when facing a conflict situation
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I. INTRODUCTION

Church conflict is not new. The church is made up of people from diverse background. Sometimes differences in opinion can cause conflict.

Ministers must study conflict management so that he can be of comfort and counsel to those he ministers to. He must realise that **conflict is a reality in the church.** A minister who is familiar with Conflict management can minimise “*the damage or hurt*” due to conflicts.

A. A study of conflict in the ministry can serve as a source of encouragement to ministers

The survey was carried out among 220 pastors in 98 churches in a 10-year period.

- 1 out of every 6 Pastors was forcefully terminated.
- 117 churches had a change of 3-5 pastors.
- 39 churches have a change of 2 pastors.
- Only 25 churches had a change of 1 pastor.

B. Conflict is always a reality in Church

It happens to every Church:

- Big or small
- Urban or small
- Big staff or small staff
- New or old traditional church
- Huge financial resources or a poor church
- Led by full-time or lay leaders
- Led by weak or strong leaders

Anything in a Church can trigger conflict. It can be the:

- Style of worship
- Timing of worship service
- Place of worship
- Preaching style
- Colour of building

C. Conflict be of value to the Church

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” **Romans 8:28**

Conflict can be of value to the church in that it can result in changes.

1. Although conflict results in hurts, it also **results in changes**.
2. Through it all people **learn to love and forgive one another**. People mature through it if they respond positively.
3. Conflict also brings people together to **search for better solutions** which results in good changes.

D. Ministers ill-prepared to deal with conflict

Ministers are poorly prepared to deal with conflict. In the formal training of earlier years, theology has been the main focus. As a result, ministers are **unprepared academically** to manage conflict. Secondly, ministers are **spiritually unprepared** to deal with conflict. Thirdly, ministers are **unprepared practically**. They do not give serious thought to the practical issues involved if one has to face a forceful termination.

Issues such as:

- How to support the Pastor and his family;
- How to counsel the Pastor and his family and
- How to have support groups for hurt parties.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

A. *Although there is value in conflict, most church members do not desire to experience any nature of conflict*

“Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”

Job 14:1

The above scripture can be taken pessimistically in that life is full of troubles. Others can see positively that since life is full of troubles, let us overcome the hurdles and make the best out of it.

According to *Arthur F. Taylor*:

The church is an institution of God that has human beings as those who comprise its membership. As human beings are finite, fallible and fragile so is that which they attempt to construct and maintain whether it be physical, emotional, mental, intellectual or spiritual in nature.

B. *The church's first recorded conflict*

The church's first recorded conflict can be found in **Acts 6:1-7**. As the church grew, they began to care for their members especially the widows. In the church, there were Grecian widows as well as Hebrew speaking widows. Conflict arose as a result of the seeming neglect of the Grecian widows regarding the distribution of food.

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."

Acts 6:1

As a result the apostles met to solve the conflict. They proposed the setting apart of seven men to do the daily distribution of food to the widows. They had to be wise and reputable men.

"Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of Spirit and Wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them."

Acts 6:3

The results of the early church conflict:

1. The apostles could **concentrate** on the ministry of prayer and the word.

"... and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word".

Acts 6:4

2. The word of God continued to **spread** and prosper.

"So the Word of God spread."

Acts 6:7

3. The other members got the opportunity to **serve**:

"They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them."

Acts 6:6

C. **Main Areas of Conflict**

There are **three main areas** from where conflict originates over and over again:

- the **office** of the pastor
- conflicts among the **people** including the pastor and his staff
- problems that arise out of the **daily life of the church**.

1. The **Pastor**

In his public life as a minister, the conflict a pastor faces eventually focuses on his preach skills, interest in ministering to the people, consistency in visitation and his leadership ability. How he functions in these areas can result in satisfaction or difficulties in the ministry.

- a) A area of conflict is his **preaching ministry**. People are generally attracted to the church by its good bible based preaching. James tells us that the tongue is hard to tame.

*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. **James 3:1-2***

As pastors, sometimes we may use the wrong words to express certain ideas. The way an idea is put across is also important. Sometimes it is not what it is said but how it is said which can cause conflict. Whatever it may be, a pastor will not be able to please everybody every Sunday in his preaching.

b) **Ministry**

Arthur F. Taylor pointed out the following:

"Preaching draws the crowds. Ministry keeps them!"

Through ministry the pastor demonstrates that he cares about the physical, mental and spiritual well being of his people. The realm of ministry includes training, encouragement, prayer support, service inside and outside the walls of the church, or simply being present in a time of need.

Ministry is an essential ingredient in the life of the New Testament congregation. The church best functions when a large number of its membership is involved in ministry. The work is more evenly distributed and there is less frustration experienced by the congregation when there is a job to be done.

Visitation is a vital ministry of the pastor. **To avoid conflict, a pastor should visit regularly his church members, especially in their times of need or crisis.**

- c) **Leadership style** can be a source of conflict. *Dr Taylor* mentioned 2 styles of leadership: The democratic and autocratic. The democratic leadership style solicits the input from others. It demonstrates that their ideas have value in the life of the church.

The autocratic or authoritarian style can be very domineering. The burden of blame is stronger on the autocratic leader when project fails. **Generally, people are quick to condemn rather than to commend.**

Of these two styles of leadership, I think the democratic style is better than the autocratic style. As to the question of which is the most **productive** leadership style, I think the mixture of both democratic and autocratic style would be most productive. If we just depend on the democratic style. Sometimes it takes a long time for consensus of opinions. On the other hand, people tend to resent an autocratic leader.

Therefore it is best to have a strong leader who will listen to the ideas of people and can implement them without hindrances.

- d) **Personal habits** cause conflict in the church.

Yes, a minister's personal habits can cause conflict in the church.

- e) **His family** can be a source of conflict.

Neglect of his family by the minister can also be a source of conflict. Some ministers spend a lot of time in their ministries and thus neglect their families.

"He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect."

1Timothy 3:4

Paul exhort ministers to manage their families well as they manage God's Household.

2. People

When you have people who are imperfect, you will have problems!

What do people bring to church that often serves as the source of conflict? *Taylor* made the following observation:

a) Attitudes

Different people have different attitudes about life. Their disposition, outlook way of seeing and responding to events, issues and other people reveals their attitude. This attitude or core substance of their lives will determine so much of how they behave in the setting of the church.

You will be pleased and encouraged as you work with church members who have a **positive attitude**. They will be **open to new ideas** and optimistic even when there is reason to feel otherwise.

Then there will be those who attitude is **not so positive**. In many instances, these are the self-appointed guard dogs of the church and all its presence in the world. They often mean well, but they more **frequently hinder than help**.

Don't even think that you can change an attitude that has sometimes taken decades to develop, but be aware of it and how it could be a potential source of serious conflict in your ministry.

b) Traditions

To change traditions without careful thought and wise planning can be destructive. People often resist changes, whatever it may be. We should also proceed cautiously with implementation and keep the people well informed.

c) Prejudice

Prejudice can be the source of ugly conflict in the church. Some biases such as rejecting people because of their colour, socio-economic status, language, or different traditions can cause conflict. The story of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-27** can be a good lesson against the evils of prejudice.

d) **Theology**

Theological differences can also result in a major conflict in the local church.

The good management of the conflict, following were the results:

- (i) Error was detected and condemned
- (ii) Church doctrine was more clearly defined
- (iii) A damaging split was avoided
- (iv) The believers were drawn closer together

3. **Organisational structure**

A lack of organisational structure can be a cause of conflict. Organisational structure deals with **policies and procedures**. A church with a strong organisational structure will help eliminate conflict. People in the organisation will then know their responsibilities as well as their limits of authority. Therefore there will be less of confusion and conflict.

III. BIBLICAL EXAMPLES AND TYPES OF CONFLICT

Christians have a wrong notion of conflict. Christians tend to think that because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, there will not be any conflicts. Because of this wrong thinking, many Christians are greatly surprised when they encounter problems with other Christians in the church.

Conflict can arise over simple or complex issues. It can be due to ways or methods of doing things. It can happen within an individual or between two parties.

A. ***Biblical examples***

1. Conflict is fact recorded in Bible in the very beginning, **Satan and God** has already been in conflict. Satan wanted to usurp God's authority and as such was thrown out of heaven.

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you whom once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. But you are brought down to the grave to the depths of the pit.

Isaiah 14:12-15

2. **Adam** and **Eve**.

In the Garden of Eden, there was conflict between man's will and God's will. Adam and Eve decided against God's will and resulted in the fall of mankind.

But God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" The man said, "The woman you put here with me-she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

Genesis 3:3,12-13

3. **Cain** and **Abel** had a conflict with each other, which resulted in the first murder.

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him."

Genesis 4:8

4. During **Abraham's** time, there was conflict between his herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen. In the end, they both parted ways. **Genesis 13:5-9**

5. **David's** household.

During David's time, there was conflict within his own household. The end result was death in the family and sorrow to David's heart.

2 Samuel 13:20,29-30

Conflict can result in positive or negative situations. The end results of conflict depend on how conflict is managed. If the conflicting parties respond in a positive and mature manner, good can come out of it.

Conflict helps us better understand people. As a result of experiencing conflict, one can better handle people and learn from past failures or weaknesses.

B. Types of Conflict

1. **Intrapersonal conflict** arises out of contention within oneself. Take for example, a struggle within oneself over issues of morality or choices of lifestyles. Intrapersonal conflict in an individual Christian arises when there is contradiction within himself. An example of intrapersonal conflict can be seen in the rich young man who approached Jesus. He wanted to follow Jesus but did not want to give up his wealth to obey Jesus.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No-one is good-except, God alone. You know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, and do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.' 'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.' Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Mark 10:17-22

2. **Interpersonal conflict** exists between two or more persons, groups of even nations. The feelings between two parties are the impetus to the driving force of interpersonal conflict.
 - a) An instance of interpersonal conflict in the Old Testament is that of Jacob and Esau. Isaac loved Esau while Rebecca loved Jacob.

The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Genesis 25:27-28

- b) Jesus and His opponents in terms of interpersonal conflict.

Jesus constantly faced interpersonal conflict with His opponents. One example is seen in Jesus healing the man with the withered hand on a Sabbath day. As a result the Pharisees were angry that He healed on the Sabbath.

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath." He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at

their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand,' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. **Mark 3:1-2,5-6**

Jesus' integrity and the scribe's hypocrisy did not go hand in hand. As a result Jesus spoke against their lifestyles and practices. As he taught, Jesus said, **Mark 12:38-40**

The interpersonal conflict resulted in the opponents delivering Jesus to Pilate: **Mark 15:1,3**

In the New Testament Church there were situations of interpersonal conflict. One example can be seen in the Corinthian Church. In the Corinthian Church, some preferred the apostle Paul to Peter while others preferred Apollos. As a result of personal preferences, it led to interpersonal conflict. **1 Corinthians 1:11-12**

3. **Substantive conflict** arises out of differences regarding facts, goals, methods or values. Take for example, a substantive conflict can arise over issues regarding programs, budgets or the building plans of the church.

Jesus' teaching was a source of substantive conflict to those who listened to Him. The Sermon on the Mount is a list of values and lifestyles which is the opposite of man's carnal ideas. **Matthews 5:7**

Jesus' openness to associate with people of diverse background caused substantive conflict with His opponents. **Luke 19:5-7**

Jesus' love and forgiveness to the adulteress was a substantive conflict with His opponents. **John 8:6,11**

C. *Summary of the Various Outcomes of Conflict*

The various outcomes of conflict include the following:

- Some conflicts are **irreconcilable**.
- Some conflicts are **reconcilable**.
- The accomplished work of Christ on the Cross enhances **reconciliation**.
- Parties are brought **together or they split**.
- **Better ideas** resulting from different opinions.
- **New energy** results or conversely, **strength is sapped**.

IV. DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES

Conflict Management style is the term used to describe the ways of dealing with a conflict situation.

A person's **feelings about goals and relationships** can influence his conflict management style. Personal goals and relationships are the two driving forces in Conflict Management. If a person feels that his goals are very important and must be achieved at any cost, he will employ the win/lose style. On the other hand, if a person feels that his goals as well as relationships are equally important, he will most likely employ the win/win style.

All the *five styles* do have their individual values.

A. Win/win style

- Both parties' goals are achieved while maintaining good relationships.
- Both parties learn to compromise and give due consideration to the ideas of others.

The dynamics involve the following:

1. **Specifically** determine the situation.
 - What is the nature of the conflict?
 - What are the issues involved?
2. Acquire **specific information**.
 - State facts.
 - Ensure you are listening when opponent is talking,
 - Evaluate before advocating.
3. Beware of **prejudice**.
 - Give opponent the opportunity to express his ideas before you condemn.

- You must have mutual respect for the people involved.
- Maintain emotional stability.
- Make careful use of power.

B. Compromise style

- Both parties' achieve a measure of their goals although it is not exactly what they want.
- They still maintain relationship.
- It is good to use when the win/win style is not possible.

C. Accommodation style

- One party learns to place his opponent's interest above his own.
- It thus maintains harmony and stability.

The accommodation style is used when relationships are given high priority over personal goals.

This style can be used in the ministry when:

- **Relationships** are of first priority.
- Need to minimise **disunity** and maintain **co-operation**.
- One wants to exercise **humility** and consider others first.
- Especially the minister is **new** in the church and wants to build social acceptance with church leaders, staff and members.

D. Win/lose style

- One party's goal is achieved.
- Useful when a quick and decisive action is needed.
- Decisions are made despite unpopular responses.

A person who implements a win/lose style will behave toward an opponent in these manners:

- He will be forceful in trying to achieve his own goals.
- He doesn't care if the other party gets hurt so long as he achieves his own goals.
- Relationships are not on his priority list but his own goals.
- He will use all his authority given him to achieve his goals.
- He may even resort to name calling or even ~~goals~~ violence.

E. Avoidance style

People can 'stay out' to avoid further trouble.

This style of managing conflict is used when one has little concern for relationships or his personal goals. Words that are commonly expressed by one who uses this style are "It's just not worth fighting about."

Withdrawal is the primary strategy. A conscious effort is made to avoid conflict through physical and mental evacuation of the stress-producing environment.

The validity of the avoidance style is in the fact that some issues are so insignificant or promise so little result, it is simply best to stay away from or avoid them.

The avoidance style can be used for a few months or for years. What happens when the avoidance style is used as an approach to managing conflict? Nothing! The one who is implementing this style is dead set in neutral and neither refuses or is unwilling to make any more move on his behalf or for the benefit for others. Ironically, this style of conflict management is a type of quiet violence. It greatly frustrates those who want to move a conflict situation in the direction of resolution.

A wise conflict manager sees the value in occasional use of the avoidance style. He realises the issue will eventually resolve itself or it may be totally out of his jurisdiction or it is an issue that no one can solve. All he can do is express his concern and support for any solution, but stay away from the conflict in the interim.

V. STRESS, ANGER AND BURNOUT IN RELATION TO CONFLICT

Three topics that are major contributors to conflict in the church have been discussed: **stress**, **anger**, and **burnout**.

Stress can have positive and negative affects in a minister's life depending on its source, strength and duration. Some authors suggest conflict have its roots in stress.

Anger is a common experience for every person. Some people are better at covering or disguising their anger, but every person gets angry. Anger can initiate and maintain conflict and certainly exist after the conflict has ended. Appropriate expressions of anger need to be learned and practised by all Christians.

Burnout is subtle in its entrance into a person's life. Many ministers experience burnout or loss of control of the intended result of their ministry efforts before they have identified their problem as burnout. Spiritual burnout causes some men to leave the ministry.

Stress, anger and burnout should not be viewed as only enemies that will overwhelm and destroy the minister and his work, but they should be seen as dynamics that do occur but can help in bringing a new and positive dimension to ministry.

A. **Stress**

1. Examples of persons who experienced stress in Scripture:

a) **Adam**

As a result of his sin and disobedience, Adam became fearful. He had hidden from the presence of God, when he was queried regarding his actions; he resorted to blame tactics.

"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."

The man said, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the trees and I ate it." **Genesis 3:8,12**

b) **Moses**

Moses was really stressed out by the unbelieving and, disobedient children of Israel. Many a time Moses has to cry out to the Lord in desperation.

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them.

Exodus 15:25

c) **Job**

He was so stressed out that he had to vent his complains to the Lord. He felt that the burden of his trials were too heavy.

"I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me."

Job 10:1-2

d) **Herod**

He was greatly distress to find out that there was an emerging new king when Jesus was born.

"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him."

Matthew 2:3

e) **Jesus**

He too great face a stressful time during his prayer vigil in the garden of Gethsemane.

"Then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Matthew 26:38-39

2. The following steps can be taken to deal with stress that can be controlled:

a) Exercise **common sense**.

Common sense warns us regarding over-indulgence. It warns us to be considerate.

- b) Take care of the **body**.

Good health and care of the body can help alleviate stress. Eat and rest well.

- c) Take care of your **mental** health.

The scripture in **Proverbs 23: 7** says, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*"

Beware of the materials, movies and facts that you consume. What the mind absorbs can affect the whole system.

- d) Have a good quiet time in **meditation**.

Begin to acknowledge God in all situations. Meditate on what God has done, can do and will do. Meditate on the greatness of God and the problems will look smaller.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. **Joshua 1:8**

- e) Make **changes** if possible.

Change requires desire and follow-up. Change of residence, job, mind and attitude can help alleviate stress.

- f) **Terminate** involvement in events that causes stress.

People hang on to ideas, relationships and habits that produce stress.

- g) Organise and make use of **time**.

A minister needs a job description. Most times one of the sources of stress can be that of the issue of time. A wise man will structure his schedules and learn to say "NO".

- h) Seek **help**.

Perhaps receive counsel from a trusted friend. A listening ear is generally very therapeutic. If this don't work, perhaps a doctor or psychotherapist may help.

B. Anger

1. Anger in light of the teaching of Scripture.

- a) Anger is a normal emotion in everyone; some people feel that anger is always bad and sinful. They may quote scriptures like **Ecclesiastics 7:9** *"Do not quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."*

- b) Paul tells us that one can be angry and yet not sinning.

"In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still anger." **Ephesians 4:26**

Anger that is sinful is that which seeks to hurt and destroy. Sometimes people quote Cain's anger as being the cause of Abel's death.

In **Genesis 4:3-7**, we have a description of Cain's murder. Cain's anger should not be blamed as evil but that it opened the door for Satan's temptation. Cain did not properly handle his anger and the temptation.

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at you door; It desires to have you, but you must master it." **Genesis 4:7**

In **John 2:13-16** we see Jesus as being angry. We certainly believe that Jesus has no sin but he was angry. Jesus had righteous anger that led to righteous deeds.

2. Anger and conflict situations.

- a) Anger can **initiate** conflict.

As people get upset and frustrated, anger can burst forth which leads to conflict. It can be verbal or physical in nature.

- b) Anger can **maintain** conflict.

Driven by anger, a person can continue to prolong conflict.

- c) Anger can **remain** after conflict.

Just because a conflict is resolved, don't be misled to think that those involved have completely processed their anger. Winners and losers can harbour anger long after the conflict.

3. Circumstances in which it is good for a person to express anger.

A person may express anger when:

- He does it **maturely**;
- Maintain **sensitivity** towards the other party;
- He is **discreet**;
- It is based on **facts** and not rumours and
- He has **no desire to seek vengeance** but the legitimate intention to correct the situation or person.

C. ***Burn-Out***

"Burn out" is a feeling that all the effort that one has put in after all the years seem to be in vain or has no visible result.

"Burn out" can be found especially in people whose profession is in helping others such as counsellors or ministers. *"Burn-out"* can be a cause of conflict.

1. Some of the dangers of *"burn out"* are:

- a) A change in **behaviour** pattern. For example, a minister starts to drink alcohol or have illicit relationships.
- b) Appearance of **indifference**.
- c) Loss of **confidence**. He seems to have lost confidence in himself, the ministry or even in God.

2. Things a minister can do deal with "burn-out".
 - a) **Exercise:** It is a good tool for dealing with 'burn out' but there must be consistency.
 - b) Be consistent in stirring the **mind**: Ministers give out a lot to others. He should take time to study. Perhaps enrolling in College or Seminary may help. Invest in books and journals that feed the mind with good and edifying materials.
 - c) Be involved in the **Community** life: As we start to give and share, we ourselves get blessed along the way.
 - d) Begin to recognise **signs** of spiritual "burn out". The symptoms are that the person becomes **negative, depressed and even cynical**.
 - e) Develop a close **walk** with God.
 - f) Be **disciplined** in quiet times of **worship, scripture reading, meditation and prayer**.

VI. CONFLICT AND THE VALUE OF SUPPORT GROUP

A. *Definition*

A support group is a gathering of about **4-12 persons** who have a common interest and concern.

They meet at a mutual and private place on a regular basis for the purpose of expressing these interests and concerns with a **desire to receive direction, correction and affirmation** by revealing their own belief under the scrutiny.

They **receive input** from each member in order to enhance personal, professional and social relationship during that period as well as at different stages of life.

B. *Conditions*

1. A support group cease being a support group when:

- It becomes a **gossip** group talking about people but no problem-solving efforts were made.
- It becomes a **prayer** meeting. Although prayer can begin or end a support group, it is essentially not designed.
- It becomes a **training** session.
- It becomes a **'brag-session'**.
- It becomes a **bible study** group.
- It becomes a **preaching** session. A person joins a support group with the desire to speak his problems so that others may listen.

2. **Prayer** and support group meeting.

Yes, prayer is important in support group meetings. We are exhorted to prayer at all times and cast all our concerns to the Lord.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." **1 Peter 5:7**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." **Philippians 4:6-7**

The caution and balance must be observed in that a support group is not to be a prayer meeting.

3. **Confidentiality** and a support group.

It is absolutely essential that confidentiality be maintained in a support group. People come and share on the basis of trust and confidentiality. If this trust is betrayed, we create problems instead of solutions. Confidentiality causes the person to open up instead of suppressing information.

"A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much." **Proverbs 20:19**

"If you argue your case with a neighbour, do not betray another man's confidence." **Proverbs 25:9**

4. Practical suggestions for building a support group.

The following are the steps one can take to build a support group:

- a) Read about a support group. Get ideas about it.
- b) Ask others who have started a support group and learn how they started.
- c) Invite 4-5 ministers to participate in a support group.
- d) Prior to the meeting of the support group, discuss the objectives and purposes of the support group.
- e) Inform them of the date time and venue of meeting. Write them so that they have no excuse for not attending.
- f) The initiator can serve as '*leader*' or '*moderator*' of the meeting.
- g) Meet in a safe, private and mutual setting away from all interruptions.
- h) Be punctual and start on time.
- i) Stress confidentiality, honesty and sincerity.
- j) Encourage participants to listen and respond at the appropriate moment.
- k) Evaluate what is going on: positive/negative.
- l) Tell the absent members that they are missed. Follow-up once or twice but does not go after them. Their absence may mean a lack of interest in the support group.
- m) Do not add new participants to the group without the consensus of existing participants.
- n) Draw quieter members to participate without embarrassing them.
- o) Be sure to reach closure of meeting.
- p) Allow the support group to run its course which usually 4-8 months.
- q) Evaluate the support group meeting.

C. *How can a support group help in conflict situations?*

A support group can be of help in a conflict situation because it helps the person to see his **weaknesses**. The participants can see even more objectively than the person's spouse can.

Participants also as a result can **avoid similar conflict situation** in their respective environment.

A support group also helps the person to seek the **best solution** to the conflict situation. As they listen to others who have gone through similar problems, they learn to manage their own conflict situations.

D. *The importance of honesty in support group meeting*

The importance of honesty in support group meetings is very needful. People usually can tell when a person is not totally honest or is trying to hide information. As a result it defeats the purpose of the support group meeting. A **lack of total honesty** in sharing will result in **inadequate solutions** because participants can only give good counsel based on the facts of the situation.

VII. PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

A. *Definition*

The phrase "*preventive maintenance*" gives the idea that if one regularly takes steps to manage conflict, destructive conflict would be eliminated or greatly reduced.

"*Preventive maintenance*" takes **time, energy and commitment** but it is the best defence against destructive conflict.

B. *"Look before You Leap"*

The phrase "*look before you leap*" is a phrase used to describe the cautious effort pastors and churches should take during negotiation with each other in regard

to a call to service. The pastor should take time to learn about the church and vice-versa.

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way."

Proverbs 19:2

1. Questions that the Pastor should consider are:

- a) What is the church's attitude towards pastors?
- b) What is the church's attitude towards a pastor having a motorbike/car or types of clothing he wears?
- c) What is the church's attitude towards church growth? Are they a comfortable lot of people who has no desire for evangelism?
- d) What are the expectations of the church regarding a pastor?
- e) What about the church staff? Are they happy where they are serving?
- f) Does the church mind if the pastor has a title "Pastor" or "Reverend"?
- g) How about involvement of the lay workers?
- h) What about by-laws or constitutions?
- i) Are you able to live by them?
- j) Will they change if necessary?
- k) Have people left the church? Why did people leave the church?
- l) How's the church attitude towards money?

Do they want to save all the money in the bank or do they want to give to missions?

2. From the church's perspective of the pastor, these are some questions they should consider:

- a) Is he able to adapt?

- b) Is he a rural person who can pastor an urban church?
- c) What is his vision?
- d) Why is he available at this time?
- e) How long does he stay before moving to another church?
- f) What is his philosophy of ministry?
- g) Is he able to preach?
- h) Is he able to carry out administration?
- i) How does his wife feel about the call?
- j) Does he spend time with his family?
- k) Is his family in order?
- l) How is his personal finance? Is he in debt?

It is very important to *"look before you leap"*. A bad *"marriage"* between a church and a pastor will end up in a bitter divorce between them.

C. *Communication*

1. Importance of communication.

Communication is essential in every aspect of church life because the church is made up of people and people must communicate. Most conflicts are due to **miscommunication** or **misinformation**. It is very essential that one communicate complete and accurate information in order to avoid conflict, especially in time of controversies.

2. Nature of good communication skills.

Communication is a result of a sender and a receiver relaying and receiving messages. Good communication skills includes:

- a) Sending accurate information at the **right time**.
- b) **Repeating** to ensure right understanding. Don't assume you'll be understood.
- c) **Listening** to what is said and what is not said. In situations of conflict, the first presentation or reasons is generally not the issue of the problems. People usually like to defend themselves by giving reasons first but the crux of the matter will then follow suit.
- d) Being **sensitive** to ideas and feelings of others.

Sometimes what is insignificant to you is significant to others.

D. *Dealing with Minor Issues*

It is better to deal with minor issues because they do become major issues over time. Once the issue becomes major, it becomes complicated. It is always wiser to *"nip it in the bud"*.

E. *Good Leadership skills in times of conflict*

It is very important to have good leadership skills in times of conflicts as they do minimise the effects thereof. Good leadership skills in times of conflict include:

1. Exercising **fairness** toward parties involved, as God does not like favouritism.

"But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers."

James 2:9

"Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to great, but judge your neighbour fairly."

Leviticus 19:15

2. Being able to make **wise** decisions.
3. Being **positive** and not reactive.
4. Choosing **issues** wisely. In a battle a general chooses issues and strategy wisely before any confrontation.
5. Not **antagonising** people. Stir a hornet's nest and you will get stung.

6. Not fighting over an issue when you know that the person you're fighting for will not remain in the church.

F. *Issues to Avoid*

Some issues should be avoided because:

1. Some issues will **disappear** with the passing of time.
2. Some issues will **subside** when the antagonist leaves the church.
3. Some issues are too **overwhelming** and have seemingly no solution to it.
4. Some issues are not worth "**fighting for**".

G. *Develop "Conflict Tolerance"*

The phrase, develops "*conflict tolerance*" means to exercise **great patience** in times of conflict by not being overly sensitive over little things and not taking things too personally. With such "*tolerance*", conflict can be kept in abeyance.

VIII. KEY POINTERS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

A. *Remember: Not every conflict has a solution*

1. No, not every conflict has a solution because some conflict is very **deeply rooted** and the parties will not give way at all.
2. Also, there are persons involved in a conflict that may have **no interest** at all **for resolution**.
3. Sometimes they may **be problematic people or mentally ill persons**.

B. *Identify the issues when facing a conflict situation*

It is very important to identify the issue when facing a conflict situation. Sometimes plenty of energy and time are spent to solve a particular problem and they eventually discover that the problem is not the real issue.

C. *Investigate alternatives during the process of managing conflict*

It is important to investigate alternatives during the process of managing conflict because dialogue opens the door for both parties to express their concerns and as a result there is a better understanding. The eventual solution will be more satisfactory because the parties feel that the mediator has listened to them.

And this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.

Deuteronomy 17: 4 & 5

D. *Keep in mind the dynamics involved in implementing the choices for resolution*

Some of the dynamics that need to be considered in an effort to implement the choices that are made for resolution:

1. Be sure both parties are sure of the solution.
2. Communicate verbally and through printed notices.
3. Timing: Don't delay too long in implementing solution.
4. Evaluate the plan. Is it working?
5. Revise the plan.

Some elements that may present in the process of implement resolution are:

- **Distrust**
- **Confusion**
- **Manipulation**
- **Self-interest**
- **Resistance**
- **Sabotage**

E. *Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is very important in conflict management. Jesus has taught us to forgive those who have wronged us. Jesus even forgave those who did not ask for forgiveness while He was on the cross.

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Matthew 6:14

F. Practical Procedural Guidelines for conflict management ¹

1. **Separate** the factions.

It is not good to get together without getting some ground rules for solving the conflict.

2. Lay out a **plan** for the meeting.

Specify the following:

- Where will the meeting be held?
- Who will speak for each group?
- What points to cover regarding the conflict?
- How many points to cover before the other party can respond?

3. Consider engaging an outside **mediator**.

It is best not to have the pastor be the mediator especially if the conflict involves intense arguments. If the pastor accepts any viewpoints, he will be accused of siding one group. This will make it difficult for him to minister to both groups in the church.

4. Have each side separately determine the **issues** and set priorities on their concerns.

Both parties must agree on issues to be discussed and not add more to it as the discussion moves along.

5. Establish common **ground**

Always focus on areas of agreement.

6. Lay out an **action plan**

- Make sure someone is in charge of implementing the action plan
- Track the progress of actions taken
- Setting goals

¹ Walt Lacey, *A Pastors' Guide to Conflict Management* (Ministries Today, May / June 1995).

- Delegating responsibilities to people involved

G. Practical Pointers to remember

1. Try to meet the needs of the other person whom you are trying to persuade.

In a conflict situation people tend to see how their needs can be met. Therefore try to look into the interests of others and not that of myself.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." **Philippians 2:3**

2. Present **both** sides

The common way of handling conflict is to present one's side and put down the other's ideas. Such a way will definitely make the persuasion difficult. By recognising the good points of the other person will make persuasion easier.

"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." **Proverbs 18:17**

3. Present your favoured viewpoint **last**.

People generally will present their favoured point first. You should save the best for the last because people tend to remember and respond to what they heard last.

4. Be **for** and not against.

By being positive you can enhance persuasion. Negative persons with their negative attitudes will not attract people to be open.

5. Don't **interrupt**.

Sometimes a person only wants to put forth his views and interrupt the other person's explanation. By letting the other person speak is a demonstration that you appreciate the person and what he or she has to say.

6. Take time to **explain** and not to hurry to make your points.

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way." **Proverbs 19:2**

7. Cover one **point** at a time.
8. Know your **key** points and keep coming back to them.

To be successful in persuasion you need to be a person whom the other can trust. Persuasion is not useful when the other person have strong opinions about the matter.

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body." **Ephesians 4:25**

Appendix

ANIMAL INSTINCTS

How do you handle conflict?

Since conflict is a **normal** part of our lives, how can we deal with it? Sometimes we respond as one or more of our animal friends.

1. Mr. Turtle -- The Withdrawer

When faced with conflict, Mr. Turtle withdraws. He has developed a hard shell of emotional insulation. He just doesn't want to get involved!

Tan was a turtle. Whenever Yen wanted to talk about their future security (a subject Tan would just as soon not discuss) he would withdraw. He wanted to bury his feelings of insecurity and just not admit that he had failed to plan for their future. Withdrawing into his shell of silence thus became his way of dealing with the conflict in his marriage.

Are you a withdrawer like our turtle friend? Do you withdraw physically, like getting up and walking out of the house? Or maybe your style of withdrawing is to emotionally turn the other person off. Perhaps you withdraw because you feel you can't win anyway. Keep in mind that withdrawing turns off the relationship as well as a possible solution.

2. Mr. Skunk -- The Fighter

Mr. Skunk says, "*I'll make you stink first!*" He loves to use sarcasm and to accuse: "*You did this, and you did that...*" He'd rather not take responsibility for what he did wrong; as a matter of fact, he refuses to!

Tan the Turtle's wife, Yen, was a skunk. She responded to Tan's seeming indifference about their future security by trying to make him stink. She would tell him what a mean guy he was, so uncaring and irresponsible in ignoring wise planning for their future. She used statements like, "*You just don't care about our children's future education,*" or "*You just think of yourself!*" Tan the turtle pulls deeper into his shell while Yen the skunk attacks.

The fighter concentrates on attacking the other person. He would rather make the other person look bad than let his own insecurities show.

3. Mr. Gorilla -- The Winner

Mr. Gorilla is a fighter who always has to win. Two weapons he likes to use are manipulation and intimidation. He has a low self-image, so he wants to look good no matter what the cost! The cost is usually a hurt relationship with the other person.

He files away old grudges, hurts, and wrongs to be pulled out and used at the appropriate times.

He is an autocratic ruler, but inside he is timid and afraid. He uses his gruffness to keep others at a distance. A gorilla has a hard time being a good team-mate with his mate. He doesn't want to get close enough to reveal his insecurities.

4. Mr. Chameleon -- The Yielder

The chameleon turns colours according to his environment, thus avoiding conflict. He takes on the opinions of those around him. When he is with a quiet group, he is quiet too. When he is with a loud group, he becomes loud. Underneath his changing colour, the chameleon is very insecure and afraid to express his real opinion. He desires to always fit in and desperately wants to be accepted. So when he meets conflict, he goes along with the crowd. The yielder will give in to get along with his partner. A habitual yielder often develops a martyr complex and likes to use emotional blackmail.

5. Mr. Owl -- The Avoider

Mr. Owl will do all he can to avoid conflict. He is the intellectualizer; his motto is "*Avoid feelings at all cost!*" He'll gladly discuss an issue on an intellectual basis, but he has no feeling from his cranium down. He deals with facts, facts and facts! Mr. Owl usually leaves a trail of hurt feelings. He finds it almost impossible to identify with the other person's feelings because he has few of his own. Since emotions are usually involved in conflict, he avoids conflict like the plague.

Mr. Owl, by the way, has two second- cousins. One, Mr. Beaver, avoids conflict by suddenly getting busy. Even the silver gets polished! The other, Mr. Ostrich, avoids conflict by sticking his head in the sand, just ignoring the situation.

What's your style?

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3 Taylor, Arthur F. *An Introduction to Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Jacksonville, Florida, 1991).