

## **Process for Resolving Concerns/Conflicts in the Church**

We all have concerns and conflicts; it happens in our church; it happens in our daily lives. How we respond can make all the difference in the outcome. Many times, these problems fester under the surface without being resolved causing continued strife and harming unity in the church or in our lives. What is a Biblical process we can follow to deal with these situations and reach a God-honoring resolution?

### **Biblical Process Model for dealing with concerns/conflicts in the church.**

Matthew 18:15-18 If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

This scripture reference gives us a model of how we, as Christians, are to handle concerns or conflicts in the church to maintain unity. It can also be used outside of the church in families, workplaces, etc. Even though this passage says "sin," it can apply to any offense that a person feels has been done to them that needs to be resolved. This scripture also references "another believer," but this model works better than any other approach whether the other person is a believer or not.

### **The Process**

#### **When an offense takes place:**

- I. The offended party needs to do a self-examination before confronting someone else.
  - A. The offended person needs to closely evaluate their view of the situation and be sure to remove bias that could cloud the issue and create a conflict where none exists. Is the offended party being distrustful, assuming wrong motives, or seeing things through their own life-experience filter?
  - B. The offended person needs to ask, "Is there really an offense here? Is it possible that this is simply a misunderstanding? Is it possible that the other person had no intent to hurt and is unaware that any hurt was caused?"
- II. If the offended party determines that the issue needs to be pursued:

- A. The offended person needs to contact the offender directly, privately and try to reach a resolution to the problem.
- III. If the offended person tries to communicate to other people in the church criticizing the offender, we must politely stop them and ask them if they have contacted the offender directly about the situation.
- A. If the offended person has not contacted the offender:
    - 1. We must provide gentle corrective instruction to the offended person, telling them to contact the offender directly and to not go through other people.
    - 2. As gently as possible, ask them to consider whether the perceived offense is worth conflict.
    - 3. Listening to the offended person's specific complaints about another is not pastoral, but rather a form of gossip. Well-meaning people with a heart towards shepherding others can get sucked into conversations that are corrosive to the church. We make the recommendation to talk with the offender without knowing or inquiring about the particulars of the situation.
    - 4. There are times when talking with the offender directly is not recommended; physical or emotional abuse are examples of exceptions to the rule.

Multiple staff members, elders, or deacons may be approached by the offended person about the same situation. The answer must be consistent and gentle to avoid gossip and model the proper biblical response.

**The following Scripture passages may be helpful:**

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Matthew 7:1-5 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "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? 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? 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.

1 Corinthians 1:10 Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.

Ephesians 4:2-4 Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future.

Proverbs 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense. (ESV) Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs. (NLT)

IV. If the offended person has followed the process and gone to the person that they had an issue with, but they did not get the issue resolved:

- A. The offended party should not go to church staff, elders, or deacons and complain about the offender.
- B. The offended person needs to seek a believer to help mediate the situation and tell that person very few details. The believer needs to avoid hearing the offender's story so as not to become biased.
  1. The offended person should select a believer that is mature, and it would be helpful if they are gifted in mediating conflict.
  2. If possible, the person selected should not be a close personal friend to either party.
  3. The offended person should not give the believer every detail of the situation or try to get them to take their side against the offender.
- C. The offended person and the believer should go together to the offender to try to resolve the issue.
  1. The offended party and the believer should not have a pre-meeting to convince the believer to side with the offended person.
  2. The believer should try to stay neutral during the meeting and encourage the 2 parties involved to come to a resolution.

Most of these situations are miscommunication, trust issues, or assuming bad motives; not true sins against each other. The general experience in the church is that the actual sins are typically the gossip, the bitterness, and the unwillingness to forgive that are a result of not following the process.

- V. If the offended person and the believer have followed the process and gone to the offender, but the issue is not resolved:
  - A. The offended person goes to the Elders.
    - 1. The Elders first must verify that the whole process has been followed before they proceed. They only need to know that there is a situation where they need to be engaged to help resolve a conflict.
    - 2. The Elders must not meet with either party without the other party present.
      - a. The only possible exception to this could be cases involving physical/sexual abuse in which case the Elders may need to direct people to the legal authorities or report the situation.
    - 3. The Elders must not hear or review any information regarding the situation prior to the meeting.
    - 4. When the meeting takes place, each party is allowed to explain why this situation has elevated to the Elders.
    - 5. The Elders have their own process for how to conduct this meeting.

**Luke 17:4 “Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him.”**

**Our goal is restoration, resolution, and forgiveness.**