

Preachers' Pen Points

COPING WITH CHANGE



It kills a church about as quickly as anything. It discourages new converts and the young. It destroys bonds of trust and unity. It alienates established friendships. Such is the devastation of personal conflict that is spread throughout the church. One type of conflict is the result of bad behavior. It may be caused by someone misusing or neglecting another person, or by a host of other things that violate the Biblical injunction to love others as ourselves.

So, what can we do to keep conflict to a minimum and manage perceived wrongs? God has given a specific prescription for this kind of conflict.

Things we shouldn't do!

- We shouldn't hold other people to standards that we are not willing to apply to ourselves (Mt. 7:1-4).
- We shouldn't assume that another person knows that he has wronged us! (Mt. 18:15)
- We shouldn't start a propaganda war against the supposed offending party, seeking to align others with our cause (Prov. 16:28; 17:9). Pitting one group of people against another to get satisfaction for a wrong holds the potential to divide a congregation.
- We shouldn't judge the motives of other people. We can't read people's minds (1 Cor. 2:11).
- We shouldn't hold people to unbiblical requirements of repentance (Lk. 17:4).
- We shouldn't put people on "probation" and look for new issues to raise in the future (1 Cor. 13:6-7).

Things we should do!

- We should be forbearing with all people (Phil. 4:5). We must learn not to make an issue of every supposed instance of neglect or possible inconsideration.
- If something affects our attitude toward another person, we should go to the person who has wronged us with our grievances and seek reconciliation! (Lk. 17:3). We should lovingly present the grounds of our perceived wrong and then give the other person the chance to explain their conduct.
- We should give others the benefit of the doubt when they intended no wrong; we should be willing to forgive when they apologize and seek to make things right (Lk. 17:4).
- We should ask others to help us if the offending party is not willing to make things right, even involving the congregation if necessary to bring a person to repentance (Mt. 18:16-17).
- We should deal with personal bitterness and not pass it on to others through complaints and repeated rehearsals of another's failings and shortcomings (Heb. 13:15).
- We should look for ways to affirm our love and respect for a brother who seeks to make things right (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

Amazingly, we who boast about "standing for the truth" may be at times the world's worst at practicing it! Who will take us seriously about wanting to do right when we do the exact opposite of what God requires of us when we think we've been wronged by someone else? —Johnny Felker