

## Doctrine of Ways to Avoid Church Conflict

### Sixty Ways to Prepare for or Minimize Spiritual Conflict in the Congregation

1. Keep your heart pure before the Lord in public and in private. This will give you a moral basis to speak with boldness and confidence. A church suffers when the leadership is not spiritual.
  - *1 Timothy 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*
2. Be careful to whom you speak and what you say. You may think you are speaking in confidence. You may think you are speaking to a loyal friend. Be careful. People have a way of betraying confidences.
  - *Psalm 55:12 For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: 13 But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. 14 We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.*
3. Do not think that what is whispered in secret will not be shouted from the rooftops. It will be. Therefore, do not say in private what you would not say in public.
  - *Luke 12:3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*
4. Defend your position with *Scripture*. Give chapter and verse for every church principle you establish and every church practice that is undertaken.
  - *Psalm 119: 1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. 2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. 3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. 4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. 5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! 6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.*
5. Guide the flock, do not fleece them nor drive them. You cannot lead where people do not want to go. You can have the courage of your convictions but you may not have a congregation to pastor.
  - *1 Peter 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*
6. Establish clear boundaries of authority and practices, stay within those boundaries and exhort others to remain under authority as well. Do not apologize for teaching what the *Word of God* teaches.

- *Hebrews 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*
  - *Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*
  - *Hebrews 13:24 Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.*
7. Do not surprise the church leaders or the people of new events or situations. Not only does failure to communicate create a sense of instability but also it offends leadership by reducing them to non-entities.
    - *Proverbs 18:19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*
  8. Try not to let the business mentality or the worldly corporate structure drive the church. While the church is to operate according to sound financial principles those principles should reflect grace giving as per 2 Corinthians 8-9. Money is not the solution to ever situation.
  9. Write into the constitution that the *Word of God* is the final authority to guide the assembly in its policies and practices. If there is conflict between the church Constitution or some worldly rules of order let the *Bible* be the final authority.
    - *Joshua 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*
  10. Have an open reporting of all money matters and an open book policy. Establish no separate funds without general approval and involvement of others in the oversight of the same.
  11. Do not display in an ostentatious public way any private gifts or resources God is pleased to give you. Gratitude and modesty are to characterize the Christian.
  12. Be as confrontational as necessary but no more. Paul speaks of individuals whose mouths must be stopped.
    - *Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: 11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*
    - *1 Timothy 5:20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*

13. Teach people to fight fair.

- No secret meetings
- No letter writing campaigns
- Accusations made before two or more witnesses
- The pattern of Matthew 18 followed
- General terms of condemnation must not be used. *“You always, etc.”*
- Stick to the issue not the personality
- Allow no hearsay assuming it is true *Proverbs 18:13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*
- No taking of sides except the side of righteousness
- Offer solutions not slander
- Make the goal restoration to fellowship

14. Have a specific time set aside for special complaints to be registered in private but with a witness present.

- *1 Timothy 5:19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*

15. Pray for one another and especially those who despise and persecute you.

- *Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. By so doing a blessing is received in return.*
- *Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

16. Do not think people will always be appreciative for your sacrifices and labors. Do not expect even a *“thank you.”* Minister because you have been called of God. Minister as unto the Lord. Do not be surprised when those you have helped the most turn on you without cause, or are ungrateful.

- *Luke 17:17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*

17. Do not grasp too tightly to any of the toys of time – a nice home, a good car, clothing, vacation – God will demand we sacrifice our *“Isaacs”*.

18. Do not criticize, period. You will rue the day you do. If a person is guilty of some matter address the issue not the person. A brother or sister offended is harder to win than an army trying to storm a city during time of war.

- *Colossians 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*
19. Believe in the doctrine of human depravity and do not be surprised when the corruption of the heart is made manifest. Expect nothing of sinners but sin.
- *Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*
20. Do not think there is a rationale to evil, it is a great mystery and is without cause and effect.
- *Psalm 35:7 For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.*
21. Be satisfied with where God puts you and resist the urge to run away from stressful situations.
- *Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*
22. Redeem the time. Work hard and let the people know you are laboring on their behalf.
- *Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*
23. Be sensitive to the culture you minister in. Dress down if necessary or adapt to their style as Hudson Taylor did when he grew a pig tail and dressed like the Chinese or as Amy Carmichael did in Japan and then in India.
24. Do not compromise your doctrinal position for sake of expedience.
- *Jude 3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*
25. Do not bend on principles. On preferences bend like a willow tree in the wind but on principles never negotiate. On November 1, 2003, I literally lost 80 percent of my congregation over the *Great Commission*. My deacons did not believe in short term mission work. So they gathered their friends and left. Nevertheless, I am here a testimony to the promise of God.
- *Revelation 3:8 "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."*

They did not leave without creating much evil, and even after they left circulated letters to places of ministry I was going too. But the Lord has been gracious.

26. Claim the promises of God.

- *Isaiah 59:19 When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.*
- *Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.*

27. Remember that the real enemy is not you but Christ. It will be discovered that individuals do not want to submit to the Lordship of Christ as they come to understand it through the Word proclaimed. Because the Word is rejected the authority of Christ is rejected and therefore the only thing left is the will of the world, the flesh or the devil. At that point the battle begins in earnest.

- *Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

28. Keep a spiritual journal of your ministry. Include the blessings of God but do not leave out any tense conversations or developing moments. Unless some documentation can be provided what was said and done it will come back in a different form and will be used as weapon to discredit you. God is keeping a journal of ministry.

- *Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

29. Do not show favoritism. Avoid becoming involved in a clique. Be a Christian to all the people.

- *James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; 3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: 4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

30. Keep the people who are your worst enemies closest to your heart not only in prayer but also in ministry. Find ways to have them help you with projects. Ask them for their counsel and help. People tend not to hurt those they are helping.

- *Romans 12:20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

31. Listen to that inner voice that you wish you had listened to on other occasions but ignored.
- *Acts 8:29 Then the Spirit said...*
  - *Acts 10:19 "the Spirit said unto him"*
32. Take a church leader very seriously if he says he is speaking on behalf of others. If he is an adversary he probably is speaking on behalf of others for he and or his wife have been initiating controversy and sowing seeds of discord. He knows if he is speaking for others for he has been recruiting their support. He has been sowing seeds of discord, which God hates.
- *Proverbs 6:16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: ...he that soweth discord among brethren.*
33. Beware of the wives of deacons. That exhortation is most biblical.
- *1 Timothy 3:11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*
34. Beware of ambitious associates or individuals who come into the assembly and pledge loyalty but will not take ownership of a subordinate position. In time this will be manifested in obvious ways.
35. Beware of emotionally charged personalities, especially those who tell you all they will do for you.
36. Beware of overloading individuals with too many responsibilities even if they ask for them.
37. Beware of users who demand your time and attention and resources as an entitlement.
38. Beware of the counsel you give. It can be used against you. Keep a log of counseling cases and keep a record of emails sent. If the inner voice tells you "*Do not send that letter*", "*Do not make that phone call*", "*Do not send that email*", listen to that inner warning.
39. If you seek counsel outside the church, be careful the outside counsel will not betray your trust in the name of the "*best interest for the church.*" I called a regional director once for the Christian school movement about a matter since he had been associated with the work longer than I, only to discover he immediately contacted someone in the church so the whole matter was twisted. There was a high price to pay for that phone call of concern.
40. Remember that people will think what they want. Perception becomes reality. Whatever information is lacking, people have a tendency to make it up, and then either believe it themselves or pass it along as an actual event. A woman accused me once of shaming her in public. When I asked what I had said she attributed something. My response was, "*I never said that.*" "*Well, she responded, that is what you meant!*"

41. Do not think the Enemy fights fair. The Enemy is vicious, vindictive, emotionally charged and has a legion to call upon both spiritually and literally. Paul spoke of “*wolves*” who would come to devour the flock.

- *Acts 20:29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*

If your personality is such that you have trouble with authority, or anger, or a dictatorial spirit, or sexual lusts, acknowledge it and seek help in addressing the areas of weakness. “*Know thyself.*” Use common techniques in a stressful situation.

- Do not meet alone with someone who is temperamental
- Lower your voice
- Do not argue but ask for time to answer
- Do not defend yourself but challenge with arresting phrases what is being falsely articulated.
  - *“That is a mistaken idea.”*
  - *“That is not being fair.”*
  - *“That is not what happened.”*
  - *“All the facts are not yet known”*

42. Avoid excessive emotional body language such as finger pointing, using the word “*you*” and waving of arms. Remember the word of Rudyard Kipling.

“If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you  
But make allowance for their doubting too,  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master,  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings--nor lose the common touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;  
If all men count with you, but none too much,  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!"

43. Seek ways to bond with one another. Normal church life is not always enough. It is the personal touches people remember the most, the informal events – playing baseball or bowling, helping them move, a special meal over at the house, a card or a phone call etc.
44. Avoid triangles especially when matters are sensitive. The objective is not to take sides except the side of righteousness.
45. Avoid disclosing confidential information even in the name of asking others to “pray” over a matter.
46. Know that your enemies will try to shape your reputation and character with secret phone calls and meetings and conversations all the while pretending to be friends and even to love you. I had a deacon whom I visited in the hospital when he had emergency surgery knowing the next week he would arise from his sick bed to vote against my ministry and try to destroy me. In one breath he told how much he loved me and in the next he tried to take away food from my table. Such is the nature of evil. It does not think clearly.
47. Be ready to accept crucifixion when the time comes. There are causalities in Christendom and there are crucifixions.
  - *Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*
48. Remember that the minister cannot impose in the same evil pain and punishment that is inflicted upon him. Confidences cannot be violated for legal and ethical reasons. Sowing discord is still something God hates.
  - *Proverbs 6:16-19 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*
49. Do not think you can initiate an action and easily reverse it if someone objects. Once matters are set into motion they cannot be reversed without a high level of emotional pain.
50. Do not be apologetic for the authority God has entrusted to you as a pastor. Leaders lead. Teach people the place of authority in the church.



- *Hebrews 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*
- *Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*
- *Hebrews 13:24 Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.*

51. Have at least “one blind eye” and “one deaf ear.”

- *James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:*

52. Do not think I have exaggerated or over stated the area of concern of conflict in the church. It is real, it is deadly, it is painful and it is devilish. Therefore,

*Ephesians 4:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

53. If individuals move against you and force a vote of confidence do not block the procedure but ask the people the following questions before the vote is taken.

- *Have I not been a good person to you?*
- *Have I not visited the sick, fed the hungry, clothed the poor, baptized those who came to faith, counseled you day or night, taught you the word of God faithfully and endured much pettiness and criticism without much comment?*
- *Does the action now taken conform to Matthew 18 or 1 Corinthians 13?*
- *Would Jesus do what you are doing today? Would He side with your cause and forced actions?*
- *Do you not remember that you will be held accountable for what you are about to do and in the day of ultimate judgment I must give an account for you?*
- *Is there not a better way to resolve areas of concern and that is according to gospel terms?*

While none of these questions will arrest the evil intended, a basis of ultimate condemnation will be established, for the moment will be revisited at the judgment seat of Christ.

- *Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

54. Develop a philosophy of forgiveness.

- *Matthew 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

55. Never forget the promise of God.

- *Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

56. Do not correct people too quickly. They will resent it and will look for the next little fault to criticize you over. Like one person said, *"I do not get mad, I get even."*

57. Do not assign motives to people they may or may not have. God knows the heart, we do not.

58. Beware of people asking question but who have secret agendas. John 8.

59. Remember that people like to be able to change their minds at the last moment without being made to feel blame or shame for disrupting plans. Accept that in human nature and allow for interruptions. Jesus was a master at adapting to existential situations.

60. Properly teach the church about elders and deacons prior to any appointments.

### **Conclusion.**

Perhaps the Lord has allowed me to have a turbulent ministry in part to make this presentation and help you avoid some of the pain and suffering associated with pastoral ministry. If that happens then it will be a partial fulfillment of the promise of Romans 8:28 for something good has come out of the process.

## **Sixty Ways to Prepare for or Minimize Spiritual Conflict in the Congregation**

1. Keep your heart pure before the Lord in public and in private. 1 Timothy 4:16
2. Be careful to whom you speak and what you say. Psalm 55:12
3. Do not think that what is whispered in secret will not be shouted from the rooftops. Luke 12:3
4. Defend your position with Scripture. Psalm 119: 1-6
5. Guide the flock, do not fleece them nor drive them. 1 Peter 5:3
6. Establish clear boundaries of authority and practices, stay within those boundaries and exhort others to remain under authority as well. Hebrews 13:7, 17, 13:24
7. Do not surprise the church leaders or the people of new events or situations. Proverbs 18:19
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10. Have an open reporting of all money matters and an open book policy.
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13. Teach people to fight fair.
14. Have a specific time set aside for special complaints to be registered in private but with a witness present. 1 Timothy 5:19
15. Pray for one another and especially those who despise and persecute you. Romans 12:14; Matthew 5:11
16. Do not think people will always be appreciative for your sacrifices and labors. Luke 17:17
17. Do not grasp too tightly to any of the toys of time – a nice home, a good car, clothing, vacation.
18. Do not criticize, period.
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21. Be satisfied with where God puts you and resist the urge to run away from stressful situations. Philippians 4:11
22. Redeem the time. Ephesians 5:16
23. Be sensitive to the culture you minister in.
24. Do not compromise your doctrinal position for sake of expedience or harmony. Jude 3
25. Do not bend on principles. Revelation 3:8
26. Claim the promises of God. Isaiah 54:17; 59:19
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51. Have at least “one blind eye” and “one deaf ear.”
52. Do not think I have exaggerated or over stated the area of concern of conflict in the church.
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