



Life Impact Ministries

PURSUING PEACE TOGETHER

Addressing Church Conflicts

By Paul Cornwell, DMin

January 10, 2025

All church conflicts are complex. While they many times begin with a disagreement between 2 or more leaders, the complexities grow the longer the issues stay unresolved. The number of issues can become dizzying. (See my article titled Complex Coaching and Consulting Services [link](#))

Over the years of conducting hundreds of 'inquiry calls', where the caller is attempting to find a path toward solution, there have been many learnings. Some of these learnings are what we see as necessary changes, if the situation is going to resolve. Others are varied sources of what is causing the situation to seem unresolvable.

This article is intended to introduce some of the most common and important aspects to consider, Essentials Actions. We will also list some of the most often observed factors allowing the situation to continue unresolved. See Limiting, Blocking, and Motivational Factors below. It is my hope to place these things on the reader's radar for their consideration.

Essentials Actions:

When determining how to effectively address unresolved conflicts and issues, it often requires what we do not naturally think of or have the skill set to achieve. There are many important things to attend to, yet when these become actionable, helpful progress is underway. Here are core discoveries that empower the progress necessary to achieve what is desired and needed in church conflicts.

- 1) Have a neutral assessment conducted.

Many current leaders are either too close to the people involved or are engaged in the situation and will likely not be seen as unbiased. Or perhaps, they have already addressed the issues based on their understanding and yet the situation has remained unresolved. When these things are in play, a different assessment process is needed. (See Assessments [link](#))



- 2) Develop a path forward to address the situation in which both sides/key participants in the conflict agree to participate.

When the parties have given sincere effort to resolving the issues and those efforts have proven ineffective, a new path-forward is needed. The scope of a new process, which an assessment would identify, must align with the levels of impact being experienced. When a new way to address the issues is suggested, many leaders and parties to the conflict appreciate that a 3rd-Party-Neutral recommended it.

- 3) Apply Biblically faithful processes.

What has been done in past attempts to resolve the issues serves as a foundation for what needs to be added. Answering questions like these helps:

- How can Biblical processes be applied more effectively?
- What preparation activities are needed or helpful?
- What is missing from past processes that need to be included?
- What focuses are necessary both to make progress and achieve a solution?

- 4) Discover a new skill set in applying well-known Biblical principles.

Church leaders know a lot! However, knowledge is not the solution. If it were, the challenges would have already been resolved. Even agreeing on what has occurred many times still leads to division or differing priorities and solutions. The result is unresolved issues.

Learning how to apply Biblical truths is necessary. While knowledge is essential, knowing isn't enough. There are many processes when applying Biblical principles. Discerning the text or texts of Scripture to apply, the appropriate principles to focus on, the processes to follow, and the timing of any meeting to address the issues are all essential. Beyond these and other elements of application, what fuels one's behavior is also essential. There are 3 factors we often see at work:



Limiting, Blocking, and Motivational Factors:

We hear many contributing and causal factors when unresolved conflicts are in place. Here's a list of some of these factors:

1-Issue/Position Thinking

Refocusing present thinking from the tenants of the arguments to applying the Gospel resulting in a solution-focused path is necessary. Being focused on the issues and each person's position on those issues is important. However, when that focus doesn't lead to resolution of the issue, change is needed. Applying processes beyond issue/position thinking is essential.

2-Specific application for each person from God's Word

It is amazing how a conflict convinces me the other person is the person who needs to change the most. To not know what God is up to in your heart and life through the current conflict is to be truly ignorant. (Matthew 7:5) How each person incorporates his own learning empowers a new ability to resolve.

Understanding the Lord's work in me at a heart level is a primary task. God's Word takes us places inside the depths of the heart, far beyond any external changes. To understand the place of God's deepest work in my heart is to gain the most essential value in the experience of conflict. (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18; 2 Corinthians 4:15-18)

3-Submitting and Repenting based on the Holy Spirit's prompting

It is the Holy Spirit who convinces each person of their sins, not the situation or other person. They simply demonstrate the sin and challenges being faced.

Understanding His voice and humbly responding to Him is the call. Repentance in both behavior and motivation is the gift of God and the pathway to joy, the loss of which our Lord would never want. (I John 1:1-4, 9: 2:28; James 4:6-10; 5:16)

4-Model humility by owning my sin and displaying the changes He is making in me personally and relationally

"Practical-humility" is outlined in Philippians 2:3-4. This is what Jesus did when He came into the world (See verses 6-11) and is Paul's exhortation to us to apply (See verse 5).



Admitting my contribution is a great starting place. Humility produces far reaching relational benefits and new pathways to resolve the most challenging of issues.

5-Forgiving in a way that releases the guilt and shame of the sinner

This is clearly the result of forgiveness that Christ produced through His sacrificial death and spotless blood. It is also His merciful provision to each Christian. How can our forgiveness of another person not achieve the same? What will it take to experience that depth of forgiveness together? (Ephesians 1:7; 4:1-3, 31-32)

Experiencing the freedom of forgiveness with the offender or as an offender is life changing. Too much is missed when conflicts thrive without the application of what Jesus did for the Christian. The Scripture has much to say about what happens in us when forgiveness is experienced. Consider one such text: Hebrews 12:14-17. The writer also warns of the unbelievable results when forgiveness is not experienced, namely bitterness. As the writer has already stated in Hebrews 4:1-2, we should fear this beyond many other fears.

An Invitation:

It would be our joy to speak with you about anything in this article or if you have a church conflict situation that remains unresolved. As you read this article, if you resonate with our findings, Let's talk about pursuing peace together.

Place Let's Talk button