



**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE CODE: CTH472**

**COURSE TITLE: Conflict Management**

**COURSE GUIDE**

**COURSE CODE: CTH 472**

**COURSE TITLE: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

**COURSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

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## **Introduction**

**CTH 472** ‘Conflict Management’ is a one semester, two units under graduate course. Presently, it is a requirement for those who wish to obtain bachelors degree in Christian Theology.

The course will consist of fifteen units, divided into three modules. Module one discusses on the *General Notion and Definition of Related Terms to Conflict Management*. Module two discusses *Biblical Foundation For Conflict Management*, while Module three discusses *The Strategies For Conflict Management*. The materials have been developed to suit a Nigerian studying at a distance.

This course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what course materials you will be using and how you are to use them. It provides some general guidelines for the amount of time you might be spending in order to successfully complete each unit of the course. It also gives you some guidance on your tutor-marked assignments, details of which are to be found in a separate ‘assignment file’. The course involves regular tutorials and you are advised to attend the sessions.

## **What You Will Learn In This Course**

This course does not presume that you have a pre-knowledge of conflict management. As a result, you are going to be assisted to build up a repertoire of knowledge on what conflict management is all about. You will come to realise that conflict management is not just an academic discipline, but it is necessary for daily living and spiritual life. You will come to appreciate that even your little Christian contributions towards changing the life of others by pursuing peace at all times is part and parcel of conflict management, which is the responsibility of every Christian. The course will be ecumenical in its approach. In this approach, it will not seek to adopt the conflict management practice of any particular church or denomination. Neither will it use the official documents on conflict management of any particular church or denomination. This course will seek to take a centrist

approach to the discussion on conflict management which will be of interest to the generality of Christians.

This course will take you first through the definition and general notion of conflict management, then through understanding the causes of conflict, the various approaches and styles of conflict management. Communication is key in conflict management; therefore this course will introduce you to the relationship between conflict management and communication. Your understanding of conflict management will help you in promoting peace in the family, the church and the nation.

The course will go on to explore the biblical foundation for conflict management. Beginning with the teaching of Jesus on conflict management as seen from Matthew 18:15-16, the course content then goes ahead to deal with some biblical ingredients required for effective conflict management. The ingredient discussed in this course includes forgiveness, agape love and humility. The course contains some examples of people who practiced conflict management in the Bible. The aim of studying the biblical foundation for conflict management is to situate conflict management in its biblical context as a revealed reality. God cares for His people in different ways and it is also God's will that His people should live at peace with all men. The Bible says the kingdom of God is all about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Our God is a God of peace. When Jesus was about to leave this world after His resurrection He said to His disciples, my peace I leave with you.

Further in this course, you will come to study the strategies for conflict management that will enable you to practice conflict management within yourself, your family, your church or congregation, your office and the society at large. Because we are in Africa there is a need to look at strategies for African conflict management.

You therefore, have an exciting course in conflict management ahead of you. Complement what you will learn in this course with your personal reflections, and take time to put what you study and reflect on into practice. A general bibliography of all the reference works used in preparing the course guide is given towards the end of this course guide. Hopefully, your use of these will enable you to deepen your knowledge in other areas of your interest, which the course content may barely treat. Again, you will notice that there are many biblical references and quotations given in this course. Please note that all the biblical quotations used in

this course are taken from (1990) The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) , Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers

### **Course Aims**

The aim of this course can be summarized as follows: The general aim of the course is to acquaint you with an academic, biblical and practical understanding of conflict management.

### **Course Objective**

In order to achieve the aim listed above, the course sets overall objectives. In addition, each unit has its own specific objectives, which are always outlined at the beginning of that unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. It is necessary to refer to them during your study of the unit, to check on your progress. Also, after completing a unit, you should glance through the unit objectives. This will enable you to be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Listed below are the wider objectives of the course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you will have achieved the aims of the course as a whole. On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Define conflict management
- Discuss the causes of conflict management
- State the various approaches to conflict management
- State the various conflict management styles
- Explain the role of communication in conflict management
- Explain the importance of forgiveness in conflict management
- Discuss the relationship between conflict management and agape love
- Discuss the importance of humility in conflict management
- Highlight the practice of conflict management by Jesus, the prophets and the early disciples
- Practicise the strategies for conflict management in your personal life, your family, your church, your office and the society at large.

**Working through this course**

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read the recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), which will help you achieve the objectives of the course. Each unit contains some self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purpose. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Stated below are the components of the course and what you have to do. The course should take about fifteen weeks to cover.

**Course Materials**

Major components of the course are:

1. Course guide
2. Study units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. Obtain your copy. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

**STUDY UNITS**

There are fifteen study units in this course divided into 3 modules of 5 units each. They are as follows:

**CONTENTS**  
**PAGES****Module 1:           General Notion and Definition of Related Terms in  
Conflict Management**

- Unit 1                   Understanding Conflict Management
- Unit 2                   Understanding the causes, usefulness and  
stages of conflict
- Unit 3                   Approaches and styles of conflict management
- Unit 4                   Communication and Conflict Management
- Unit 5                   Conflict Resolution

**Module 2:           Biblical Foundation for Conflict Management**

- Unit 1                   The Bible and the Conflict
- Unit 2                   Biblical approach to conflict management in the Church
- Unit 3                   Jesus' Teaching on conflict management
- Unit 4                   Biblical Reconciliation
- Unit 5                   Biblical Teaching on Conflict Avoidance

**Module 3:           Strategies for Conflict Management**

- Unit 1                   Understanding Conflict in the Work Place
- Unit 2                   Parent-Child Relationship

Unit 3	Conflict with Young Children
Unit 4	The Pastor's Role in Managing Church Conflict
Unit 5	The Place of Conflict Resolution in the Church

Each unit includes a table of contents, introduction, specific objectives, recommended textbooks and summaries of key issues and ideas. At intervals in each unit, you will be provided with a number of exercises or self-assessment questions. These are to help you test yourself on the material you have just covered or to apply it in some way. The value of these self-tests is to help you gauge your progress and to reinforce your understanding of the material. At least one tutor-marked assignment will be provided at the end of each unit. The exercises and the tutor-marked assignments will help you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

### **Set Textbooks**

Oyeshola, Dokun. 2005. *Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limited.

Kennedy, Eugene. 1981. *Crisis Counselling: The Essential Guide for Non Professional Counsellors*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.

### **Assignment File**

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

### **Presentation Schedule**

The presentation schedule included in your course materials gives you important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments by the due date. You should guard against falling behind in your work.

### **Assessment**

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination. In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during the course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count 30% of your total course mark. At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will count for 70% of your total course mark.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignments**

There are fifteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best four (i.e. the highest four of the fifteen assignments) will be counted. The total marks for the best four (4) assignments will be 30% of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials contained in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your viewpoint and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is due to discuss the possibility of an extension.

### Final Examination and Grading

The final examination CTH 417 will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercise and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

### Course Marking Scheme

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assignment	Marks
Assignment 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

**Table 1: Course Marking Scheme**

### COURSE OVERVIEW

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Module	Title of work	Week's Activity	Assessment (end of units)
Unit	Course Guide	1	

<b>Module 1</b>	<b>General notion and definitions of related terms in conflict management</b>		
1	Understanding Conflict Management	1	Assignment 1
2	Understanding the Causes, usefulness and stages of Conflict	2	Assignment 2
3	Approaches and styles of Conflict Management	3	Assignment 3
4	Communication and Conflict Management	4	Assignment 4
5	Conflict Resolution	5	Assignment 5
<b><u>Module 2</u></b> Unit	<b>Biblical Foundation for Conflict Management</b>		
1	The Bible and conflict	6	Assignment 6
2	Biblical approach to conflict management in the church	7	Assignment 7
3	Jesus' Teaching on conflict Management	8	Assignment 8
4	Biblical Reconciliation	9	Assignment 9
5	Biblical Teaching on conflict Avoidance	10	Assignment 10
<b><u>Module 3</u></b> Unit	<b>Strategies for Conflict Management</b>		
1	Understanding Conflict in the Work Place	11	Assignment 11

2	Parent-Child Relationship	12	Assignment 12
3	Conflict With your children	13	Assignment 13
4	The Pastor's Role in managing Church conflict	14	Assignment 14
5	The place of conflict Resolution in the church	15	Assignment 15
	Revision	16	
	Examination	17	

**Table 2: Course Overview**

### **How to Get the Most from this Course**

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning, you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer in the same way that a lecturer might set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format .The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from internet resources.

**Reading section**

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

- 1) Read this course guide thoroughly
- 2) Organize a study schedule. Refer to the "course overview" for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
- 3) Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work, if you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
- 4) Turn to unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
- 5) Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the overview at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
- 6) Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work, through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
- 7) Review the objectives for each study unit to conform that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
- 8) When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit.
- 9) When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
- 10) After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objective (listed in the course guide).

## **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are eight hours of tutorial provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor- marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
- you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises
- you have a question or problem with an assignment with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only opportunity to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

## **Summary**

CTH 472 intends to introduce you to the basic issues in Conflict Management. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer question such as:

- What is Conflict Management
- What are the different approaches to Conflict Management
- The role of communication in Conflict Management
- Discuss the key points in Jesus' teaching on Conflict Management
- How to manage conflict in the Church
- How to manage conflict in the family

The questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful in your day to day life.

**COURSE CODE: CTH 472**

**COURSE TITLE: CONFLICT MANAGMENT**

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### **Course Aims**

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### **Course Objective**

In order to achieve the aim listed above, the course sets overall objectives. In addition, each unit has its own specific objectives, which are always outlined at the beginning of that unit. You should read them before you start working through the unit. It is necessary to refer to them during your study of the unit, to check on your progress. Also, after completing a unit, you should glance through the unit objectives. This will enable you to be sure that you have done what was required of you by the unit.

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- State the various conflict management styles
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### **Working through this course**

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read the recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), which will help you achieve the objectives of the course. Each unit contains some self-assessment exercises, and at points in the course you are required to submit assignments for assessment purpose. At the end of this course there is a final examination. Stated below are the components of the course and what you have to do. The course should take about fifteen weeks to cover.

### **Course Materials**

Major components of the course are:

6. Course guide
7. Study units
8. Textbooks
9. Assignment file
10. Presentation schedule

In addition, you must obtain the materials. Obtain your copy. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

## STUDY UNITS

There are fifteen study units in this course divided into 3 modules of 5 units each. They are as follows:

### CONTENTS

#### PAGES

<b>Module 1:</b>	<b>General Notion and Definition of Related Terms in Conflict Management</b>	
Unit 1	Understanding Conflict Management	
Unit 2	Understanding the causes, usefulness and stages of conflict	
Unit 3	Approaches and styles of conflict management	
Unit 4	Communication and Conflict Management	
Unit 5	Conflict Resolution	
<b>Module 2:</b>	<b>Biblical Foundation for Conflict Management</b>	
Unit 1	The Bible and the Conflict	
Unit 2	Biblical approach to conflict management in the Church	
Unit 3	Jesus' Teaching on conflict management	
Unit 4	Biblical Reconciliation	
Unit 5	Biblical Teaching on Conflict Avoidance	
<b>Module 3:</b>	<b>Strategies for Conflict Management</b>	
Unit 1	Understanding Conflict in the Work Place	1
Unit 2	Parent-Child Relationship	
Unit 3	Conflict with Young Children	
Unit 4	The Pastor's Role in Managing Church Conflict	
Unit 5	The Place of Conflict Resolution in the Church	

Each unit includes a table of contents, introduction, specific objectives, recommended textbooks and summaries of key issues and ideas. At intervals in each unit, you will be provided with a number of exercises or self-assessment

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### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination CTH 417 will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercise and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

### **Course Marking Scheme**

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Marks</b>
Assignment 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count at 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks

Total	100% of course marks
-------	----------------------

**Table 1: Course Marking Scheme****COURSE OVERVIEW**

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

<b>Module</b>	<b>Title of work</b>	<b>Week's Activity</b>	<b>Assessment (end of units)</b>
Unit	Course Guide	1	
<b>Module 1</b>	<b>General notion and definitions of related terms in conflict management</b>		
1	Understanding Conflict Management	1	Assignment 1
2	Understanding the Causes, usefulness and stages of Conflict	2	Assignment 2
3	Approaches and styles of Conflict Management	3	Assignment 3
4	Communication and Conflict Management	4	Assignment 4
5	Conflict Resolution	5	Assignment 5
<b>Module 2</b>	<b>Biblical Foundation for Conflict Management</b>		
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4	The Pastor's Role in managing Church conflict	14	Assignment 14
5	The place of conflict Resolution in the church	15	Assignment 15
	Revision	16	
	Examination	17	

**Table 2: Course Overview****How to Get the Most from this Course**

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning, you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer in the same way that a lecturer might set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other material. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format .The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have finished the units you must go back and check whether you have achieved the

objectives. If you make a habit of doing this you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from internet resources.

### **Reading section**

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

- 11) Read this course guide thoroughly
- 12) Organize a study schedule. Refer to the "course overview" for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
- 13) Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work, if you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
- 14) Turn to unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
- 15) Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the overview at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
- 16) Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work, through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
- 17) Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
- 18) When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit.
- 19) When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

- 20) After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objective (listed in the course guide).

### **Tutors and Tutorials**

There are eight hours of tutorial provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor- marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
- you have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises
- you have a question or problem with an assignment with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only opportunity to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

### **Summary**

CTH 471 intends to introduce you to the basic issues in Conflict Management. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer question such as:

- What is Conflict Management
- What are the different approaches to Conflict Management
- The role of communication in Conflict Management
- Discuss the key points in Jesus' teaching on Conflict Management
- How to manage conflict in the Church
- How to manage conflict in the family

The questions you will be able to answer are not limited to the above list. We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful in your day to day life.

**MODULE 1 GENERAL NOTION AND DEFINITION OF RELATED TERMS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

Unit 1:	Understanding Conflict Management
Unit 2:	Understanding the Causes of Conflict
Unit 3:	Approaches to Conflict Management
Unit 4:	Communication and Conflict Management

**UNIT 1: UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Understanding the Concept of Conflict
3.2	Types of Conflict
3.3	Conflict Prevention
3.4	Conflict Mediation
3.5	Conflict Management
3.6	Conflict Resolution
3.7	Conflict Transformation
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignments
7.0	References/ Further Readings

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Conflict Management is critical in every facet of human relationship, therefore in this unit you will be introduced to the concept of conflict, the types of conflict and various related terminologies such as; Conflict management, Conflict mediation, Conflict resolution and Conflict transformation. In this unit it will be assumed that this is your first contact with the concept of conflict management and its related terminologies.

Wherever choices exist, there is potential for disagreement. Such differences, when handled properly can result in richer, more effective, creative solutions and interaction. But alas, it is difficult to consistently turn differences into opportunities. When disagreement is poorly dealt with, the outcome can be contention. Contention creates a sense of psychological distance between people, such as feelings of dislike, bitter antagonism, competition, alienation, and

disregard. When contention is not quickly handled, it grows into becoming a conflict which will require conflict management to handle the problem.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of Conflict
- Describe the different types of Conflict
- Define Conflict prevention
- Define Conflict Management in your own words
- Explain the difference between Conflict resolution and Conflict Management
- Discuss the concept of Conflict transformation

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT**

Conflict is a normal and even healthy part of our relationships. After all, two people cannot be expected to agree on everything at all times so we need to change the way we understand the word conflict. Conflict can be negative (destructive) which leads to unhealthy relationship or positive (constructive) which leads to healthy relationship. Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship. But when handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two or more people. By learning the skills you need for successful conflict resolution, you can keep your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

Conflict arises from differences which if not properly handled will produce sharp disagreement and sometimes violent clashes. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires. Sometimes these differences look trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal and relational need is at the core of the problem—a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy. Conflict also occurs when you have disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas or viewpoints mostly held by two or more individuals/groups; however you can have disagreement within yourself, when there are more than one motives or thoughts conflicting within you. There are times when you know that something is wrong but you feel like doing it, at such times you will notice the conflict within you, you will feel unhappy if you do not do what you feel like doing, but if you do

what you feel like doing, you will begin to suffer from the guilt of doing what you know is wrong. When you unleash violence on somebody it usually leads to conflict, and when such a conflict is not resolved early, it will lead to more violence.

Deutsch (1973:1) views conflict as an action, which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures or renders ineffective another action with which it is incompatible. Osita Agbu (2006, 2) looks at conflict, as an opportunity to change. This means that conflict is neither negative nor positive. What determine the way conflicts go are our own attitudes; how we were brought up (our backgrounds) and the information we have. These factors often dictate the way we manage any conflict. For example if your closest friend says to you, you are mad; your reaction will be different from if it was your perceived enemy that said the same words to you. Therefore it is not so much the words that were said to you or the actions done against you, but the person who said it (whether older or younger), your mood at the time it was said, the relationship you have with the person who said it, and your personal temperament (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic or melancholic). Chaplin, (1979:109) defines conflict as “the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives” while Wilson and Hanna, (1979:255) describe conflict as ‘a struggle involving ideas, values, and limited resources”. Dokun (2005, 111) believes that conflict is often rooted in people’s beliefs and perceptions about goals as opposed to objective facts. He went ahead to itemise unhealthy and helpful approaches to conflict.

<b>Unhealthy Approach</b>	<b>Helpful Approach</b>
Perceives conflict as always being a disruption of order, a negative experience, an error or mistake in relationship	Perceives conflicts as often being an outgrowth of diversity which may hold possibilities for improving the relationship
A battle between incompatible self-interests, desires, power or goals	Perceives conflict as one part of a relationship, a part which may involve needs, interests, values, perceptions, power, feeling, etc
An isolated event we allow to define the entire relationship	Perceives conflict as occurrences which punctuate a relationship and which can help clarify the relationship
Always a struggle between right versus wrong or good versus evil	A confrontation between difference in certain aspects of a relationship but other aspects are still there to build on

Several authors have different definitions for conflict, but for this course we will work with a simplified definition for conflict which is that Conflict is the result of any antagonistic difference between ideas, persons or groups contending for

supremacy at any given time. Let us then proceed to articulate the different types of conflict.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1**

In your own words, what does conflict mean to you? State and discuss one of the definitions of conflict.

## **3.2 TYPES OF CONFLICT**

Conflict occurs among different classes of people and produces different kinds of results. We will consider only four types of conflicts that are based on where the conflict happens and two types of conflicts based on the kind of effect the conflicts produce.

### **A. Conflicts based on location includes:**

1. **Intrapersonal Conflict:** This occurs within a person as he takes a decision on the use of time, choice of partner, moral issues, goals and aspirations etc. This is capable of producing anxiety and tension within the person going through this kind of conflict.
2. **Interpersonal Conflict:** This is a conflict that occurs between two or more individuals. It may result from differences in opinion, motives and actions. This kind of conflict is what is seen when two people are having disagreement among themselves.
3. **Intragroup Conflict:** This may occur between individuals within a group. This is similar to interpersonal conflicts except that it occurs within a particular group. This kind of conflict can be seen when for example two members of the choir are having disagreement about something which has to do with the choir.
4. **Intergroup Conflict:** This is a conflict that occurs between groups of people such as solidarity groups, activity groups and church denominations. This kind of conflict occurs when for example members of the choir are in disagreement with members of the Ushering team or one country at war with another country.

### **B. Conflicts based on the effects produced include;**

1. **Functional or Constructive Conflict:** This kind of conflict improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation through which problems can be aired and tensions released. This kind of conflict is also referred to as positive conflict because it is a conflict that helps the people involve to improve their relationship for good. An example of this kind of conflict is when people argue from different points of view on the same matter with an open mind, they end up arriving at a new position which is

an improvement on their previous myopic views. This kind of conflict helps you understand the sensitivity of the other person on a particular issue, which will help you avoid conflicts in such matters in the future. This was the kind of conflict that was among the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians in Acts 15.

2. **Dysfunctional or Destructive Conflict:** This type of conflict leads to retarded communication, reduction in group cohesiveness and a subordination of goals to primacy of in-fighting among members. This kind of conflict produces bitterness, envy, anger and unforgiveness. This type of conflict is usually protracted with no immediate and permanent solution at sight.

For most people, when you mention the word conflict, what comes to their minds is the dysfunctional or destructive type of conflict. Nevertheless we now know that there are constructive and destructive types of conflict but the choice of which to practice is entirely dependent on you. Let us then proceed to study different ways to manage our conflicts.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2**

List and discuss in your own words the different types of conflict

### **3.3 CONFLICT PREVENTION**

Conflict prevention is all about preventing the outbreak of violent conflicts, for it is generally said that prevention is better than cure. Intractable conflicts are better and easier to avoid before they happen, than trying to manage or solve them once they have occurred. For, even if you are successful in putting off the conflict, the scar from a violent conflict can always start the conflict again.

When we talk of conflict prevention we are not saying people should pretend that there are no issues to confront, on the contrary conflict prevention advocates that latent conflicts should not be repressed or submerged altogether, for when this is done, they just tend to erupt, sometimes violently, at a later time. Therefore to avoid this, conflict should be allowed to surface, but the complicating factors, especially escalation of the conflict, should be limited to the maximum extent possible and an effort should be made to confront the core conflict with the most beneficial and least destructive strategies available.

Conflict prevention is only useful to the extent that the parties involved can control complicating factors from the onset by defining the conflict as a mutual problem rather than a competitive or win-lose situation. Conflict prevention aims to create an environment where conflicts are nipped in the bud before they get out of hand

and become uncontrollable, however where conflicts have started, conflict prevention tries very hard to isolate the conflict in a way that the conflict is not allowed to grow. But once the conflict escalates and other complicating factors develop, the strategy must change from conflict prevention to conflict management or resolution, which is considerably harder to manage successfully.

In the church today, one way we can practice conflict prevention is in marriages, by insisting on proper courtship and teaching intending couples properly on the several challenges that they are likely to encounter in their marital lives. If this is done, it will save the church the situation where pastors are trying to apply conflict management to problems that might never be fully resolved.

### **Self-Assessment 3.3**

#### **Define and explain the term conflict prevention**

### **3.4 CONFLICT MEDIATION**

Mediation helps stakeholders discuss issues, repair past injuries and develop the tools needed to face disagreements effectively. Mediators may help participants glimpse at their blind spots, broaden their perspectives, and even muddle through the problem-solving process. Yet, successful mediators remember that the challenges are owned by the stakeholders and do not attempt to short-circuit the process by solving challenges for them. This is the point where many mediators miss the point, they want to quickly solve the problem and move on, so they take over the problem solving process and tell everyone what they need to do and any party that does not agree to their solution is rejected by them. Mediators are to help the parties involve solve the problem, this way even if the mediator is not around the conflicting parties own the resolution of the crisis.

Mediation is an informal, voluntary and confidential process in which a trained professional dispute resolver (the mediator) facilitates understanding, communication and negotiation between disputing parties and assist those parties in reaching their own mutually acceptable resolution to their dispute. Note that the key words are facilitates and assists.

The major aim of a mediator is to help the parties in conflict reach a mutually satisfying agreement. The mediator does this by improving the flow of information in a meeting between parties in conflict.

Mediation according to Moore (1996:1) is “The intervention in a negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute”.

Mediation can also be defined as a problem-solving negotiation process, in which an outside, impartial neutral party works with disputants to assist them to reach a satisfactory negotiated agreement. Unlike judges or arbitrators, mediators have no authority to decide the dispute between the parties; instead, the parties empower the mediator to help them resolve the issue between them.

Mediation differs from negotiation, in that parties with apparently incompatible demands turn over the dispute resolution process, but not the dispute itself, to the mediator. However when facilitators are used in negotiating, the process is similar to mediation.

Mediation also differs from arbitration, in that a mediator makes no decisions as to how the case should be resolved; rather the mediator guides the parties in making this determination.

Mediation differs also from case evaluation, in that the mediator makes no finding as to the value of the claims and there is no penalty if the mediation is successful.

Mediation is different from litigations, in that it is quicker and less expensive and allows the parties to work-out their own solutions in private rather than having an unknown result imposed on them by a judge or jury in a lengthy, expensive and formal process

#### **Self-Assessment 3.4**

Using any of the definitions for mediation given in this course, discuss the term mediation

### **3.5 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

Conflict management refers to the long-term management of intractable conflicts involving institutionalized provisions and regulative procedures for dealing with conflicts whenever they occur. It describes the way we respond to and deal with conflicts before, during and after it has occurred. It is the label for the variety of ways by which people handle grievances—standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Briefly stated, conflict management is about using managerial tactics to contain a conflict, to put a lid on it, and control the environment. Conflict management is often considered to be distinct from conflict resolution. Because many conflicts cannot be really resolved, we use the term conflict management rather than conflict resolution. Good conflict management enables parties to co-exist amicably and deal with their disputes without necessarily resolving the underlying conflict. For example, we may never be able to resolve the various conflicts among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria;

we have only been able to manage the conflict, which is why we are still together as a nation fifty years after independence.

Conflict resolution consists in dealing with the conflict in a way that brings the conflict to a closure, an end, a resolution that will please either parties or one of the parties in conflict. But the conflict management and conflict resolution approaches are now bypassed by a new approach called conflict transformation. The latter approach readily suits the process of discipleship and Christ-likeness better.

Conflict management strategies and not conflict resolution strategies will be needed in a situation where two people have parallel opinions on an issue, that is, their opinions cannot be reconciled, and none of the parties involved is willing to give up his opinion for there to be progress. Conflict management involves the control, but not resolution of a long-term or deep-rooted conflict. This is the approach taken when complete resolution seems to be impossible, yet something needs to be done. In cases of resolution-resistant or even intractable conflict, it is possible to manage the situation in ways that make it more constructive and less destructive. The goal of conflict management is to intervene in ways that make the ongoing conflict more beneficial and less damaging to all sides. For example, sending peacekeeping forces into a region enmeshed in strife may help calm the situation and limit casualties. However, peacekeeping missions will not resolve the conflict. In some cases, where non-negotiable human needs are at stake, conflict management is the most feasible step.

### **Self-Assessment 3.5**

Define the term Conflict Management.

## **3.6 CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

This aims at identifying the causes of the conflicts on ground and finding new ways of reconciling the groups involved and building a new social relationship. Incompatible interests are not the only thing that is a problem in more severe conflicts. Conflicts last longer and are more deeply rooted than disputes. They tend to arise over non-negotiable issues such as fundamental human needs, intolerable moral differences, or high-stakes distributional issues regarding essential resources, such as money, water, or land. To truly resolve a conflict, the solution must go beyond just satisfying the parties' interests as in dispute settlement. To end or resolve a long-term conflict, a relatively stable solution that identifies and deals with the underlying sources of the conflict must be found. This is a more difficult task than simple dispute settlement, because resolution means going beyond negotiating interests to meet all sides' basic needs, while simultaneously finding a

way to respect their underlying values and identities. However, some of the same intervention processes used in dispute settlement (i.e. mediation) is also used to achieve resolution.

True conflict resolution requires a more analytical, problem-solving approach than dispute settlement. The main difference is that resolution requires identifying the causal factors behind the conflict, and finding ways to deal with them. On the other hand, settlement is simply aimed at ending a dispute as quickly and amicably as possible. This means that, it is possible to settle a dispute that exists within the context of a larger conflict, without resolving the overall conflict. This occurs when a dispute is settled, but the underlying causes of the conflict are not addressed. Almost every year, despite the several peace meetings and settlements between Christians and Moslems in the northern part of Nigeria, every time there is a conflict, the problem still comes up again and again. This is so because we are so much in a hurry to have temporary peace than to seek a permanent solution which is resolving the situation by dealing with the underlying problem(s) that causes the conflict to always resurface.

There are many reasons why underlying causes of conflict may not be addressed. Often, the underlying causes of conflict are embedded in the institutional structure of society. Achieving complete resolution of a conflict can require making significant socioeconomic or political changes that restructure society in a more just or inclusive way. Changing societal structures, such as the distribution of wealth in society, is a difficult thing to do and can take decades to accomplish. Thus, fully resolving conflict can be a long laborious process. As a result there are other conceptions of ways to deal with, but not necessarily "resolve" conflicts.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.6**

What do you understand by the term Conflict Resolution?

## **3.7 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**

A number of conflict theorists and practitioners, including John Paul Lederach, advocate the pursuit of "conflict transformation", as opposed to "conflict resolution" or "conflict management." Conflict transformation is different from the other two, Lederach asserts, because it reflects a better understanding of the nature of conflict itself. "Conflict resolution" implies that conflict is bad, and is therefore something that should be ended. It also assumes that conflict is a short-term phenomenon that can be "resolved" permanently through mediation or other intervention processes. "Conflict management" correctly assumes that conflicts are

long-term processes that often cannot be quickly resolved. The problem with the notion of "management," however, is that it suggests that people can be directed or controlled as if they were physical objects. In addition, "management" suggests that the goal is the reduction or control of volatility, rather than dealing with the real source of the problem.

Conflict transformation, as described by Lederach, does not suggest that we simply eliminate or control conflict, but rather that we recognize and work with its "dialectic nature." First, Lederach argues that social conflict is a natural occurrence between humans who are involved in relationships. Once conflict occurs, it changes or transforms those events, people, and relationships that created the initial conflict. Thus, the cause-and-effect relationship goes both ways -- from the people and the relationships to the conflict and back to the people and relationships. In this sense, "conflict transformation" is a term that describes the natural process of conflict. Conflicts change relationships in predictable ways, altering communication patterns and patterns of social organization, altering images of the self and of the other.

Conflict transformation is also a prescriptive concept. It suggests that the destructive consequences of a conflict can be modified or transformed so that self-images, relationships, and social structures improve as a result of conflict instead of being harmed by it. Usually, this involves transforming perceptions of issues, actions, and other people or groups. Conflict usually transforms perceptions by accentuating the differences between people and positions. The Bible says as a man thinketh in his heart, so he is, (Proverbs 23:7 KJV), therefore, if you think that somebody is your enemy, you will begin to act towards him as your enemy. Lederach believes that effective conflict transformation can utilize this highlighting of differences in a constructive way and can improve mutual understanding. From the perspective of conflict transformation, intervention has been successful if each group gains a relatively accurate understanding of the other. In the end, improving understanding is the objective of conflict transformation, in spite of parties differing or even irreconcilable interests, values and needs.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.7**

Discuss the concept of Conflict Transformation

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Since conflicts frequently exist in the society, it is imperative for us to understand the several ways of approaching the issue of conflict management. Though conflicts do occur at different levels of human interaction, efforts must be made to keep conflict from escalating from simple quarrels to the use of violence. Some of the ways through which conflict can be resolved include; Conflict prevention, Conflict mediation, Conflict management, Conflict resolution and Conflict transformation. The type of solution that will be used at any time depends on several factors, some of which includes; the stage of the conflict, the willingness of both parties to solve the conflict, the skill of the mediator etc.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

We have explained the concept of conflict and the various ways of managing conflicts, which includes; Conflict Prevention, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. What is Conflict?
2. Define Conflict Management.
3. List and discuss four ways in which conflict can be managed.
4. Explain the differences between Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

Oyeshola, Dokun (2005). Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limited. Pp 111

Osita, Agbu (2005). West Africa's Trouble Spots and the Imperative for Peace Building, Dakar, CODESRIA, (forthcoming). Pp 2

Wilson, G.L and Hanna. M.S. (1979) Groups in Conflict: Leadership and Participation in Small Groups, New York: McGraw-Hill. Pp 255

Moore, C.W (1996). *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Conflict*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers. Pp 1

Deutsch, M. (1973). *The Resolution of Conflict*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Pp 1

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## **UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES, USEFULNESS AND STAGES OF CONFLICT**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0** Introduction
- 2.0** Objectives
- 3.0** Main Content
  - 3.1** Sources of Conflict
  - 3.2** Analysing Positive and Negative Conflicts.
  - 3.3** Usefulness of Conflict
  - 3.4** Stages of Conflict
- 4.0** Conclusion
- 5.0** Summary
- 6.0** Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0** Reference/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

When disagreement is poorly dealt with, the outcome can be contention. Contention creates distance between people. For example feelings of dislike, among family member, hired personnel etc. With hired personnel and strangers, we may often try and put forth our best behaviour. Out of concern for how we are perceived, we may err in saying too little when things go wrong. We may suffer for a long time before bringing issues up. This is especially so during what could be called a "courting period. Instead of saying things directly, we often try to hint.

Persons differ in their sensitivity to comments or actions of others, as well as their ability to deal with the stress created by a conflict situation. While it is important that we are sensitive to how we affect others, there is much virtue in not getting easily offended ourselves or by finding constructive outlets to dissipate stressful feelings. However, it does little good to appear unaffected while steam builds up within and eventually explodes. When disagreements emerge, it is easy to hear without listening. People involved in conflict often enlist others to support their perspective and thus avoid trying to work matters out directly with the affected person.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the different sources of conflict
- Distinguish between positive and negative forms of conflict

- Explain the different stages of conflict
- Explain the relationship between the post conflict stage and conflict emergence

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

When you have more than one person or idea, there is a likelihood of conflict; therefore conflict is only a problem when there is poor conflict management which can result in poor productivity and very low level of employee satisfaction.

Conflict is inevitable and sometimes good, for we most times only get or produce the best when our ideas or personality is challenged, therefore conflict is not always a problem. Getting the most out of diversity means often-contradictory values, perspectives and opinions.

There many different things, ideas or situations that initiate conflict, in this unit we will consider a few of the major causes of conflict, which includes:

- **Value conflicts:** caused by parties having different criteria to evaluate ideas, or by different lifestyles, ideologies, or religions. it can also be within yourself, you're not living according to your values or when your values and perspectives are threatened by fear of the unknown or from lack of fulfilment.
- **Relationship conflicts:** caused by strong emotions, misperceptions, miscommunications, and regular, negative interactions.
- **Data conflicts:** caused by a lack of information, different interpretations of data and different views on what is relevant. There is poor communication, for example when church members experience continuing surprises and do not even understand reasons for decisions taken, especially on things concerning them. This kind of atmosphere will generate conflict.
- **Interest conflicts:** caused by competition over substantive interests, procedural interests or psychological interests.
- **Structural conflicts:** caused by destructive patterns of behavior, unequal control and ownership of resources, unequal power and authority, time constraints and geographical/environmental factors that hinder cooperation. When the amount of resources available for interested parties is insufficient, there is usually disagreement about who does what, who gets what; these tends to produce stress among interested parties which will then lead to conflict.
- **Avoidance:** When we engage in avoidance, it only weakens already fragile relationships. People usually tend to agree with us not just because they are our friends, but mostly because they see the conflict and possible solutions

from our perspective. After all, they heard the story from us. Once a person has the support of a friend, she may feel justified in her behaviour and not try to put as much energy into solving the conflict. One particularly damaging form of conflict avoidance is to send someone else to deliver a message or confront another on our behalf, the individual not spoken to directly will be hurt that such a tactic was taken.

Dokun Oyeshola, (2005:120) said psychological needs of groups and individuals are other sources of conflict. The issue here include personal and group self-actualization form of respect, protection of self interest so as to become better than others.

Several foes often combine to create contention, these are as follows:

- Our first enemy is the natural need to want to explain our side first. We reason that, if they understand our perspective, they will come to the same conclusions we did.
- Our second enemy is our ineffectiveness as listeners. Listening is much more than being quiet so we can have our turn. It involves a real effort to understand another person's perspective.
- Our third enemy is fear. Fear that we will not get our way. Fear of losing something we cherish. Fear that we will be made to look foolish or embarrassed. Fear of the truth that we may be wrong.
- Our fourth enemy is the assumption that one of us has to lose if the other is going to win and that such differences can only be solved competitively.

The good news is that there are simple and effective tools to spin positive solutions and strengthen relationships out of disagreements. But let not the simplicity of the concepts obscure the challenge of carrying them out consistently. Certainly life gives us plenty of opportunities to practice and attempt to improve. However, the foes outlined above take effort to overcome.

However, if conflict is not handled effectively, the results can be damaging. Conflicting goals can quickly turn into personal dislike. Teamwork breaks down. Talent is wasted as people disengage from their work. And it is easy to end up in a vicious downward spiral of negativity and recrimination.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

Discuss seven (7) sources of conflict?

## **3.2 ANALYSING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONFLICTS**

Conflict on its own is not a problem; it is when conflict is poorly managed that it becomes a problem. By being proactive in identifying areas in which damage

might be done, we are more likely to experience positive outcomes (Anderson and Olson 2003: 26).

### **Positive Conflicts**

In many cases, effective conflict resolution skills can make the difference between positive and negative outcomes. The good news is that by resolving conflict successfully, you can solve many of the problems that it has brought to the surface, as well as getting benefits that you might not at first expect.

The following are positives that result from conflicts:

- Increased understanding: The discussion needed to resolve conflict expands people's awareness of the situation, giving them an insight into how they can achieve their own goals without undermining those of other people.
- Increased group cohesion: When conflict is resolved effectively, team members can develop stronger mutual respect and a renewed faith in their ability to work together.
- Improved self-knowledge: Conflict pushes individuals to examine their goals in close detail, helping them understand the things that are most important to them, sharpening their focus and enhancing their effectiveness.
- Helps to raise and address problems.
- Energizes work to be on the most appropriate issues.
- Helps people to be real, for example, it motivates them to participate.
- Helps people learn how to recognize and benefit from their differences.

### **Negative Conflicts**

Conflict is negative when it:

1. Hampers productivity.
2. Lowers morale.
3. Causes more and continued conflicts.
4. Causes inappropriate behaviours.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

In what ways can conflict be beneficial?

### **3.3 TYPES OF MANAGERIAL ACTIONS THAT CAUSE WORKPLACE CONFLICTS**

1. Poor communication
  - a. Employees experience continuing surprises, they are not informed of new decisions, programs, etc.
  - b. Employees do not understand the reasons for the decisions; they

- are not involved in the decision-making.
  - c. As a result, employees trust the "rumour mill" more than the management.
2. The alignment or the amount of resources is insufficient. There is:
    - a. Disagreement about "who does what".
    - b. Stress from working with inadequate resources.
  3. "Personal chemistry", including conflicting values or actions among managers and employees, for example:
    - a. Strong personal natures do not match.
    - b. We often do not like in others what we do not like in ourselves.
  4. Leadership problems, including inconsistent, missing, too-strong or uninformed leadership (at any level in the organization), evidenced by:
    - a. Avoiding conflict, "passing the buck" with little follow-through on decisions.
    - b. Employees see the same continued issues in the workplace.
    - c. Supervisors do not understand the jobs of their subordinates.

### **Self – Assessment 3.3**

List the types of Managerial Actions that Cause Workplace Conflicts

### **3.4 STAGES OF CONFLICT**

Most conflicts go through a series of stages, which may or may not occur in order. They start as latent conflict then emerge, escalate, de-escalate and are resolved--sometimes permanently, sometimes temporarily until they emerge or escalate again.

1. **Pre-Conflict or Latent stage:** This is the period when there is an incompatibility of goals between two or more parties, which could lead to open conflict. At this stage, there are deep value differences or significant injustice, which will potentially lead to an active conflict. The conflict is hidden from general view, although one or more of the parties is likely to be aware of the potential for confrontation. There may be tension in relationships between the parties and/or a desire to avoid contact with each other at this stage. It is common for significant tensions or grievances to persist over long periods of time without resulting in a noticeable conflict.

2. **Confrontation or emergence:** At this stage the conflict has become more open. If only one side feels there is a problem, its supporters may begin to engage in demonstrations or other confrontational behaviour. Occasional fighting or other low levels of violence may break out between the sides. Each side may be gathering its resources and perhaps finding allies with the expectation of increasing confrontation and violence. Relationships between the sides are becoming very strained, leading to a polarization between the supporters of each side. Usually a confrontation between parties, like a large public demonstration, serves as the match and quickly ignites the dry, waiting materials. Confrontation usually means that the covert or structural forms of violence are being rejected publicly. Emergence or confrontation may be followed quickly by settlement or resolution or it may be followed by escalation, which can become very destructive.

Confronting an issue may require the following:

- (1) Exposing oneself to ridicule or rejection,
- (2) Recognizing we may have contributed to the problem, and
- (3) Willingness to change.

3. **Crisis or escalation:** This is the peak of the conflict, when the tension and/or violence is most intense. In a large-scale conflict, this is the period of war, when people on all sides are being killed. Normal communication between the sides has probably ceased. Public statements tend to be in the form of accusations made against the other side(s). When a conflict reaches the escalation phase, it intensifies quickly. Escalating conflicts can turn into a spiral with each side continually provoking each other to raise the stakes, making the conflict more and more destructive. For example a man sat in his train compartment looking out into the serene Russian countryside. Two women entered to join him. One held a lap dog. The women looked at this man with contempt, for he was smoking. In desperation, one of the women got up, lifted up the window, took the cigar off the man's lips, and threw it out. The man sat there for a while and then proceeded to re-open the window, grab the woman's dog from off her lap and threw it out of the window.

Once conflicts escalate for awhile, the parties often reach a stalemate, a situation in which neither party can win, but neither party wants to back down. At this stage the parties have two options, continue to bleed each other dry or look towards resolution. If the pain of continuing the conflict exceeds that of maintaining the confrontation, the parties are in what Zartman (1989) calls a "hurting stalemate," which often presents an ideal opportunity for negotiation and a potential settlement. Finally, if and when

an agreement is reached, peace building efforts work to repair damaged relationships with the long-term goal of reconciling former opponents.

4. **Outcome:** One way or another, crisis will lead to an outcome. One side may defeat the other(s), or perhaps call a ceasefire (if it is a war). One party might surrender or give in to the demands of the other party. The parties may agree to negotiations, either with or without the help of a mediator. An authority or other more powerful other third party might impose an end to the fighting. Conflicts do not escalate indefinitely. Eventually, they reverse direction, decreasing in intensity until they are forgotten or resolved. In any case, at this stage the level of tension, confrontation and violence decrease somewhat with the possibility of settlement.
  
5. **Post-Conflict:** Finally, the situation is resolved in a way that leads to an ending of any violent confrontation, to a decrease in tensions and to a more normal relationship between the parties. However, if the issues and problems arising from their incompatible goals have not been adequately addressed, this stage could eventually lead back into another pre-conflict situation. The repeated failure to negotiate an end to a conflict confirms its intractability. Often these failures discourage new attempts and create a burden of mistrust to be overcome. Consequently, the struggle continues. The post-conflict stages are as follows:
  - a) **Negotiation Stage**  
In the negotiation stage, parties search for mutually-beneficial ways of resolving their conflict. This stage must be timed and executed very carefully in order to avoid a return to the escalation stage.
  
  - b) **Settlement Stage**  
The settlement stage marks the end of the active conflict. With the waning of apartheid in South Africa, for example, the South African identity began to incorporate all the people of South Africa instead of just black or white. This was a sign that the settlement stage of the conflict was successful. However as John Paul Lederach said, there is no quick fix to ongoing violent conflict. (Lederach 1997: 78).
  
  - c) **Peace-building and Reconciliation Stage**  
In long-running inter-group conflicts, after successful negotiation, peace-building and reconciliation is necessary to prevent a return to the conflict. In this stage, disputants begin to heal and to rebuild relationships, slowly

putting their society back together. Kriesberg (1998:322) suggests there are four aspects of reconciliation:

- Truth (coming to acknowledge there is some merit to the other side's interpretation of events),
- Justice (gaining redress as a means of putting the past to rest),
- Regard (forgiveness on the part of victims), and
- Security (expectations of peaceful coexistence).

### **Self Assessment 3.4**

Explain the different stages of Conflict

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We often are too quick to assume that a disagreement has no possible mutually acceptable solution. Talking about disagreements may result in opportunities to strengthen relationships and improve productivity. Obviously, talking problems through is not so easy. We can reduce stress, resolve challenges and increase productivity through effective dialogue. Such a conversation entails as much listening as talking. While effective two-way exchanges will happen naturally some of the time, for the most part they need to be carefully planned. There may be some pain--or at least moving us out of our comfort zones--involved in discussing challenging issues, but the rewards are satisfaction and improved long-term relationships.

When faced with challenges, we tend to review possible alternatives and come up with the best solution given the data at hand. Unwanted options are discarded. While some decisions may take careful consideration, analysis, and even agony, we solve others almost instinctively. Our best solution becomes our position or stance in the matter. Our needs, concerns and fears all play a part in coming up with such a position. Misunderstanding and dissent can grow their ugly heads when our solution is not the same as those of others.

Unresolved conflicts often threaten whatever self-esteem we may possess. By finding someone who agrees with us, we falsely elevate that self-esteem. But we only build on sand. Our self-esteem will be constructed over a firmer foundation when we learn to deal effectively with the conflict.

It takes more skill, effort and commitment--and, at least in the short run, more stress--to face the challenge together with the other person involved in the dispute. Certainly it seems as if it would be easier to fight, withdraw, or give in. Yet in the long run, working through difficulties together will help us live a less stressful and more fulfilling life.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have considered various ways in which conflict can begin and how to differentiate between negative and positive conflicts. We went further to explain how to prevent conflict from becoming a crisis and the various stages involve in conflict management

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED QUESTIONS**

1. Why is conflict inevitable?
2. How can you avert a potential conflict?
3. How does the knowledge of the particular stage of conflict help to manage the conflict?
4. Why is peace building necessary in the Post Conflict Stage?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS**

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## **UNIT 3: APPROACHES AND STYLES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Thomas and Kilmann's styles
  - 3.2 Interpreting Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Inventory Scores
  - 3.3 The "Interest-Based Relational Approach
  - 3.4 Approaches to Conflict
  - 3.5 Effects of Cooperative and Competitive Approaches
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Missionaries get into conflict with each other. Pastors and lay people get into conflict. Volunteers in ministry organizations find themselves in conflict. Human relations managers in businesses often find themselves managing situations of inter-personal conflict. Therefore conflict is not evil in itself, the way we handle conflict will determine its outcome. In this unit we will be looking at the different styles and approaches to dealing with conflict in order to produce a positive outcome at the end of every conflict.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain Thomas and Kilmann's style of dealing with conflict
- Discuss the Interest Base Relational Approach
- Understand and Apply the different strategies for managing stressful conflicts
- Know which conflict Approach to use in different situations
- Discuss Morton Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 THOMAS AND KILMANN'S STYLE

In the 1970s Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann identified five main styles of dealing with conflict that vary in their degrees of cooperativeness and assertiveness. They argued that people typically have a preferred conflict resolution style. However they also noted that different styles were most useful in different situations. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) helps you to identify which style you tend towards when conflict arises.

Thomas and Kilmann's styles are:

**Competitive:** People who tend towards a competitive style take a firm stand, and know what they want. They usually operate from a position of power, drawn from things like position, rank, expertise, or persuasive ability. This style can be useful when there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made fast; when the decision is unpopular; or when standing against someone who is trying to exploit the situation selfishly. However it can leave people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful when used in less urgent situations.

**Collaborative:** People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when a you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution; when there have been previous conflicts in the group; or when the situation is too important for a simple trade-off.

**Compromising:** People who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something and the compromiser also expects to relinquish something. Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming.

**Accommodating:** This style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. This person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. Accommodation is appropriate when the issues matter more to the other party, when peace is more valuable than winning, or when you want to be in a position to receive the favour you gave. However people may not return favours, and overall this approach is unlikely to give the best outcomes.

**Avoiding:** People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. It can be appropriate when victory is impossible, when the controversy is trivial, or when someone else is in a better position to solve the problem. However in many situations this is a weak and ineffective approach to take.

Once you understand the different styles, you can use them to think about the most appropriate approach (or mixture of approaches) for the situation you're in. You can also think about your own instinctive approach, and learn how you need to change this if necessary.

Ideally you can adopt an approach that meets the situation, resolves the problem, respects people's legitimate interests, and mends damaged working relationships.

### **Self-Assessment 3.1**

List and Discuss the Thomas-Kilmann Styles of dealing with Conflict

### **3.2 Interpreting Thomas Killman Conflict Mode Inventory Scores**

Usually, after getting the results of any test or assessment, the first question people ask is: What are the right answers? In the case of conflict-handling behaviour, there are no universal right answers. All five modes are useful in some situations: each represents a set of useful social skills.

The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends upon the requirements of the specific conflict situation and the skill with which the mode is used. Each of us is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes: none of us can be characterized as having a single, rigid style of dealing with conflict. However, any given individual uses some modes better than others and therefore, tends to rely upon those modes more heavily than others, whether because of temperament or practice.

The conflict behaviours which individuals use are therefore the result of both their personal predispositions and the requirements of the situations in which they find themselves. The Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument is designed to assess this mix of conflict-handling modes.

To help you judge how appropriate your utilization of the five modes is, we have listed a number of uses for each mode based on lists generated by company presidents. Your score, high or low, indicates how often you tend to utilize each mode in the appropriate situation. There is a possibility that your social skills lead

you to rely upon some conflict behaviours more or less than necessary. To help you determine if this is a problem for you we have also listed some diagnostic questions to serve as warning signals for the under or overuse of each mode.

### **A. Competing**

Uses:

- When quick, decisive action is vital – e.g., emergencies.
- On important issues where unpopular courses of action need to be implemented – e.g., cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline.
- On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right.
- To protect yourself against people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour.

If the questions and answers below represent your experience then: It shows your normal conflict handling mode.

- Are you surrounded by "yes" men?
- If so, perhaps it's because they have learned that it's unwise to disagree with you, or have given up trying to influence you. This closes you off from information.
- Are subordinates afraid to admit ignorance and uncertainties to you?
- In competitive climates, one must fight for influence and respect – which means acting more certain and confident than one feels. The upshot is that people are less able to ask for information and opinion – they are less able to learn.

If the questions and answers below do not represent your experience: then it shows this is not your normal conflict handling mode

- Do you often feel powerless in situations?
- It may be because you are unaware of the power you do have, unskilled in its use, or uncomfortable with the idea of using it. This may hinder your effectiveness by restricting your influence.)
- Do you have trouble taking a firm stand, even when you see the need?
- Sometimes concerns for other's feelings or anxieties about the use of power cause us to vacillate, which may mean postponing the decision and adding to the suffering and/or resentment of others.

## **B. Collaborating**

Uses:

- To find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised.
- When your objective is to learn – e.g., testing your own assumptions, understanding the views of others.
- To merge insights from people with different perspectives on a problem.
- To gain commitment by incorporating other's concerns into a consensual decision.
- To work through hard feelings which have been interfering with an interpersonal relationship.

If the questions and answers below represent your experience then: It shows your normal conflict handling mode.

- Do you spend time discussing issues in depth that do not seem to deserve it?
- Collaboration takes time and energy – perhaps the scarcest organizational resources. Trivial problems don't require optimal solutions, and not all personal differences need to be hashed out. The overuse of collaboration and consensual decision-making sometimes represents a desire to minimize risk by diffusing responsibility for a decision or by postponing action.
- Does your collaborative behaviour fail to elicit collaborative responses from others?
- The exploratory and tentative nature of some collaborative behaviour may make it easy for others to disregard collaborative overtures, or the trust and openness may be taken advantage of. You may be missing some cues that indicate the presence of defensiveness, strong feelings, impatience, competitiveness, or conflicting interests.

If the questions and answers below do not represent your experience then, it shows this is not your normal conflict handling mode

- Is it hard for you to see differences as opportunities for joint gain – as opportunities to learn or solve problems?
- Although there are often threatening or unproductive aspects of conflict, indiscriminate pessimism can prevent you from seeing collaborative possibilities and thus deprive you of the mutual gains and satisfactions which accompany successful collaboration.)
- Are subordinates uncommitted to your decisions or policies?
- Perhaps their own concerns are not being incorporated into those decisions or policies.

### **C. Compromising**

Uses:

- When goals are moderately important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes.
- When two opponents with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals – e.g., as in labour-management bargaining.
- To achieve temporary settlements to complex issues.
- To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure.
- As a backup mode when collaboration or competition fails to be successful.

If the questions and answers below represent your experience then: It shows your normal conflict handling mode.

- Do you concentrate so heavily upon the practicalities and tactics of compromise that you sometimes lose sight of larger issues – principles, values, long-term objectives, or company/team welfare?  
Does an emphasis on bargaining and trading create a cynical climate of gamesmanship?
- Such a climate might undermine interpersonal trust and deflect attention away from the merits of the issues discussed.)

If the questions and answers below do not represent your experience: then it shows this is not your normal conflict handling mode

- Do you find yourself too sensitive or embarrassed to be effective in bargaining situations? Do you find it hard to make concessions?
- Without this safety valve, you may have trouble getting gracefully out of mutually destructive arguments, power struggles, etc.

### **D. Avoiding**

Uses:

- When an issue is trivial, of only passing importance, or when other more important issues are pressing.
- When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns – e.g., when you have low power or you are frustrated by something which would be very difficult to change (national policies, someone's personality structure, etc.)
- When the potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution.
- To let people cool down – to reduce tensions to a productive level and to regain perspective and composure.

- When gathering more information outweighs the advantages of an immediate decision.
- When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.
- When the issue seems tangential or symptomatic of another more basic issue.

If the questions and answers below represent your experience then: It shows your normal conflict handling mode.

- Does your coordination suffer because people have trouble getting your inputs on issues?
- Does it often appear that people are "walking on eggshells?" (Sometimes a dysfunctional amount of energy can be devoted to caution and the avoiding of issues, indicating that issues need to be faced and resolved.)
- Are decisions on important issues made by default?

If the questions and answers below do not represent your experience: then it shows this is not your normal conflict handling mode

- Do you find yourself hurting people's feelings or stirring up hostilities? (You may need to exercise more discretion in confronting issues or more tact in framing issues in non-threatening ways. Tact is partially the art of avoiding potentially disruptive aspects of an issue.)
- Do you often feel harried or overwhelmed by a number of issues? (You may need to devote more time to setting priorities – deciding which issues are relatively unimportant and perhaps delegating them to others.)

### **E. Accommodating**

Uses:

- When you realize that you are wrong (or less experienced or knowledgeable) – to allow a better position to be heard, to from others, and to show that you are reasonable. 8"
- When the issue is much more important to the other person than to yourself – to satisfy the needs of others, and as a goodwill gesture to help maintain a cooperative relationship.
- To build up social credits for later issues which are important to you.
- When continued competition would only damage your cause – when you are outmatched and losing.
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially important.
- To aid in the managerial development of subordinates by allowing them to experiment and learn from their own mistakes.

If the questions and answers below represent your experience then: It shows your normal conflict handling mode.

- Do you feel that your own ideas and concerns are not getting the attention they deserve?  
(Deferring too much to the concerns of others can deprive you of influence, respect, and recognition. It also deprives the organization of your potential contributions.)
- Is discipline lax?  
(Although discipline for its own sake may be of little value, there are often rules, procedures, and assignments whose implementation is crucial for you or the organization.)

If the questions and answers below do not represent your experience: then it shows this is not your normal conflict handling mode

- Do you have trouble building goodwill with others?  
(Accommodation on minor issues that are important to others is a gesture of goodwill.)
- Do others often seem to regard you as unreasonable?
- Do you have trouble admitting it when you are wrong?
- Do you recognize legitimate exceptions to rules?
- Do you know when to give up?

Now that you know a little more about conflict styles and your personal preferences, the goal is to develop skills in all of the styles so that you can mold conflict into a constructive form. Conflict can be used to help expose important issues, develop learning and creativity, and can help to develop trust and openness (Brake & Walker, 1995).

Once you understand your styles you can view conflict management through five interrelated issues: source issues, strategy issues, context issues, reaction issues, and power issues.

**Source issues** in teams can result from individuals having different values, beliefs, and perceptions of self-interest. Team members can have conflicting goals and priorities, contrasting methodologies, different perceptions of events, and disparities in the distribution of work.

**Strategy issues** arise when people don't have the skills to choose the appropriate conflict management style. Conflict can escalate when incompatible potential

solutions to conflicts have not been analyzed and when there is no acknowledgement of the importance of the issue to individual team members.

**Context issues** are concerned with where and when the conflict is taking place, which includes culture, environment, and the history of the conflict. Conflict will escalate because of context issues when there is a loyalty to a specific sub group within the team, or when one member feels they must support friends within the team; this creates factions or polarized subgroups. Another context issue that can be cultural is when the team members admire or tolerate displays of anger or stubbornness; this can result in conflict escalation.

**Reaction issues** involve the emotions being expressed during the conflict. An example of a reaction issue is when team members see themselves as under attack. Conflicts can escalate when one or more team members perceive they are losing the conflict.

**Power issues** usually involve resources such as money, time, knowledge, skill, information authority, legitimacy, and networking issues. Conflict escalation occurs in this context when there is a lack of authority to restrain hostile behaviour.

Recognizing the different aspects of a conflict and the different manners in which conflict escalates allows you to deal with situations more effectively. When a conflict has high intensity and detrimentally effects the entire team the plan should be to narrow the issues down to specific issues so it can be resolved.

### **Self- Assessment 3.2**

Explain Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument

## **3.3 THE INTEREST-BASED RELATIONAL APPROACH**

The second theory is commonly referred to as the Interest-Based Relational (IBR) Approach. This conflict resolution strategy respects individual differences while helping people avoid becoming too entrenched in a fixed position.

In resolving conflict using this approach, you will have to follow these rules:

- **Make sure that good relationships are the first priority:** As far as possible, make sure that you treat the other person calmly and that you try to build mutual respect. Do your best to be courteous to one-another and remain constructive under pressure.

- **Keep people and problems separate:** Recognize that in many cases the other person is not just being difficult – real and valid differences can lie behind conflictive positions. By separating the problem from the person, real issues can be debated without damaging working relationships.
- **Pay attention to the interests that are being presented:** By listening carefully you'll most-likely understand why the person is adopting his or her position.
- **Listen first; talk second:** To solve a problem effectively you have to understand where the other person is coming from before defending your own position.
- **Set out the Facts:** Agree and establish the objective, observable elements that will have an impact on the decision.
- **Explore options together:** Be open to the idea that a third position may exist, and that you can get to this idea jointly.

By following these rules, you can often keep contentious discussions positive and constructive. This helps to prevent the antagonism and dislike which so-often causes conflict to spin out of control.

Based on these approaches, a starting point for dealing with conflict is to identify the overriding conflict style employed by yourself, your team or your organization.

Over time, people's conflict management styles tend to mesh, and a “right” way to solve conflict emerges. It's good to recognize when this style can be used effectively, however make sure that people understand that different styles may suit different situations.

Look at the circumstances, and think about the style that may be appropriate. Then use the process below to resolve the conflict:

### **Step One: Set the Scene**

If appropriate to the situation, use the rules of the IBR Approach (or at least consider using the approach yourself.) Make sure that people understand that the conflict may be a mutual problem, which may be best resolved through discussion and negotiation rather than through raw aggression. If you are involved in the conflict, emphasize the fact that you are presenting your perception of the problem. Use active listening skills to ensure you hear and understand other's positions and perceptions.

### **Step Two: Gather Information**

Here you are trying to get to the underlying interests, needs, and concerns. Ask for the other person's viewpoint and confirm that you respect his or her opinion and need his or her cooperation to solve the problem.

Try to understand his or her motivations and goals, and see how your actions may be affecting these. Also, try to understand the conflict in objective terms: Is it affecting work performance? Damaging the delivery to the client? Disrupting team work? Hampering decision-making? Etc. Be sure to focus on work issues and leave personalities out of the discussion.

### **Step Three: Agree that the Problem Exist**

This sounds like an obvious step, but often different underlying needs, interests and goals can cause people to perceive problems very differently. You will both need to agree that there is a problem that you are trying to solve before you will both be able to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Sometimes different people will see the same thing differently so if you can not reach a common perception of the problem, then at the very least, you will both need to understand what the other person sees as the problem.

### **Step Four: Brainstorm Possible Solutions**

If everyone is going to feel satisfied with the resolution, it will help if everyone has had fair input in generating solutions. Brainstorm possible solutions, and be open to all ideas, including the ones you never considered before.

### **Step Five: Negotiate a Solution**

By this stage, the conflict may be resolved: Both sides may better understand the position of the other, and a mutually satisfactory solution may be clear to all.

However you may also have uncovered real differences between your positions. This is where a technique like win-win negotiation can be useful to find a solution that, at least to some extent, satisfies everyone.

There are three guiding principles here: Be Calm, Be Patient, Have Respect...

### **Self-Assessment 3.3**

List and discuss the various rules and process in resolving conflict using the Interest Based Relational approach.

## **3.4 APPROACHES TO CONFLICT**

How can you manage disagreements in ways that build personal and collegial relationships rather than harming them? Such disagreements or conflicts can occur between individuals or between groups of people. Here are five strategies from conflict management theory for managing stressful situations.

Approach	Description	When to use	Drawbacks
<p>Problem Solving -</p>	<p>The problem-solving approach involves supporting the individuals involved in the conflict to help them consider all the options and find the best solution. Sometimes referred to as the confrontation approach</p>	<p>This approach should be employed in situations where there is not a clear concise agreed to solution, There is time to allow the parties to collaborate and innovate. For this approach to work, it is also important that the conflicting parties both bring ideas and creativity to the problem. The cooperation of all will be needed to carry through with decisions. Deeply felt concerns, divergent perspectives, people unwilling to compromise Those involved need to learn more about issues and options Emotions are running high or a relationship has been damaged, yet commitment or interdependence is strong. A decision or deal will have far-reaching consequences. You can carve out sufficient time and attention. Workable solutions are not immediately evident, creativity and synthesis are needed.</p>	<p>Process takes time, energy, effort, commitment from all sides, and often money. Decisions can be delayed too long, meetings get soggy. Disagreements about process can derail discussion of content. Revealing your interests may not be wise if future litigation or more competitive bargaining is a possibility. In highly polarized environments, it can be difficult to bring a constituency to agree to collaborative process or solutions.</p>

<p>Compromise</p>	<p>Compromise involves working out a middle ground that satisfies all parties to some degree. The compromising approach requires each of the conflicting members to accede in order to achieve a resolution.</p>	<p>This approach should be employed in situations When both parties have a valid but different approach to resolve the problem or complete the task hand, or when there is not a best practice to be followed. By assuring everyone's perspective is considered and represented, this approach will allow a win-win situation to occur. Stalemate: your goals are mutually opposite (where your loss is my gain) and the parties have similar amount of leverage. A fallback when other negotiating approaches don't work. Reaching your goal is not worth the effort or disruption of a full-scale negotiation. Interim settlements during a longer problem-solving, judicial, or political process. A quick decision is more important than an optimal or principled one. The parties have similar ideas about what constitutes fair procedure and outcome. Lawyers, politicians, middle management--any one for whom making workable and quick</p>	<p>Short-term pragmatic focus means sometimes losing sight of principles, own needs, long-term objectives, non-monetary aspects of negotiation. Create precedents for decision-making that may be damaging in later situations. Avoids really finding out what a conflict is about.</p>
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		decisions, and living to negotiate another day is more important than sticking to principles.	
Smoothing or Serve// Accomodate Serve // Accommodate	Smoothing de-emphasizes the differences between points of view and focuses on commonalities. The smoothing approach involves minimizing the importance of the problem at the heart of the conflict in an effort to make the conflict seem pointless	<p>This approach is particularly useful for minor or unimportant issues, or issues that are not critical to project success.</p> <p>The issues and possible solutions are less important than maintaining goodwill.</p> <p>To show your reasonableness, to signal concern for the other party.</p> <p>To put a favor "in the bank" for a future negotiation--when you know the other party also practices reciprocity.</p> <p>To cut your losses when you have less leverage.</p> <p>The decision or outcome is not your responsibility.</p> <p>You need to keep customers or co-workers happy, to have minimal disruption of business.</p> <p>Dealing with people who are volatile, discontent, and can cause much damage.</p>	<p>More competitive people may take advantage of you. Disregard own needs and an opinion until it is too late. Set a precedent in relationships that may result in being overlooked and overworked.</p> <p>Have happy clients but don't achieve enough profit from them. You may bend too quickly without really seeking to understand their situation or yours.</p>
Forcing	The forcing approach requires others to yield to the point of view of one side or another. It is	This approach should be used when time is a critical factor. It is imperative that the project manager provides the desired resolution to the conflict. This	<p>Can be too rigid and unyielding. Don't take time to hear what a client needs. May alienate key people.</p>

	<p>also called the win-lose approach and can increase conflict. The forcing approaches involves you, as project manager, using your influence and power within the project team to simply resolve the issue yourself, making a decision about the way to move forward.</p>	<p>approach doesn't solve the conflict, but it does ensure that things get done.                  Important issues are at stake and you know your proposal is right.                  The other party will probably react with relative good sportsmanship to your win and negotiate with you again another day.                  You don't need the cooperation or goodwill of the other party in the future, you don't care what they think or feel.                  You are negotiating with someone who prefers to be competitive.                  You want to look tough, competent, and passionate in front of an audience or constituency.                  You enjoy the mental challenge and adrenaline rush!</p>	<p>May not have the best solution but won't discover that until too late. Get caught in lies or other unethical means of pressure. Overconfident about own abilities, and therefore less likely to analyze and learn from the negotiation.</p>
<p>Withdrawal</p>	<p>Withdrawal involves avoiding or retreating from the conflict or potential conflict and allowing the involved parties to work out the conflict on their own. The withdrawing</p>	<p>Because this approach involves avoiding the problem, it should not be used very often. It can be a temporary solution to deal with heated and emotional conflicts, or it can be used if the issue isn't relevant to the work of the project team.                  The issues are petty or unimportant to you, or the conflict is symptomatic of other</p>	<p>The situation may not "go away". You may lose the respect of people who expect you to engage. You don't find out what the other party's needs and perceptions are, nor do you have a "reality</p>

	<p>approach involves giving in to the conflict by simply refusing to acknowledge that there is a problem and declining to discuss it.</p>	<p>conflicts that don't involve you.                  You or others need time to cool down.                  You doubt you will be able to satisfy your concerns.                  You have little leverage in the situation.                  Potential disruption of relationship or status quo is not worth the risk of addressing the situation.                  You need more time to gather information, prepare strategies, identify allies and BATNAs.                  You are not the right person to take on this conflict or negotiation.                  You do not wish to be visibly engaged with certain parties or issues.</p>	<p>check" on your own. Your anxiety may lead you to accommodate without thinking it through. You don't get what you need or what you could have negotiated successfully for yourself.</p>
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**Self – Assessment 3.4**

List and explain the five strategies for managing stressful situations.

**3.5 EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE AND COMPETITIVE APPROACHES**

Deutsch distinguishes between two key dimensions of personality: assertiveness in the pursuit of one's own goals, and cooperativeness in pursuit of mutual goals. Morton Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition includes predictions about what sort of interactions will occur between negotiating parties as a result of their disputing style.

Cooperative styles are characterized by:

1. Effective communication where ideas are verbalized, group members pay attention to one another and accept their ideas and are influenced by them. These groups have less problems communicating with and understanding others.
2. Friendliness, helpfulness, and less obstructiveness is expressed in conversations. Members tend to be generally more satisfied with the group and its solutions as well as being impressed by the contributions of other group members.
3. Coordination of effort, division of labour, orientation to task achievement, orderliness in discussion, and high productivity tend to exist in cooperative groups.
4. Feeling of agreement with the ideas of others and a sense of basic similarity in beliefs and values, as well as confidence in one's own ideas and in the value that other members attach to those ideas, are obtained in cooperative groups.
5. Willingness to enhance the other's power to achieve the other's goals increases. As other's capabilities are strengthened in a cooperative relationship, you are strengthened and vice versa.
6. Defining conflicting interests as a mutual problem to be solved by collaborative effort facilitates recognizing the legitimacy of each other's interests and the necessity to search for a solution responsive to the needs of all." This tends to limit the scope of conflicting interests and keep attempts to influence each other to decent forms of persuasion.

A competitive process will most likely have the opposite effects on the parties:

1. Communication is obstructed as the conflicting parties try to gain advantage by misleading each other through false promises and misinformation. Communication is ultimately reduced as the parties realize they cannot trust one another's communications as honest and informative.
2. Obstructiveness and lack of helpfulness lead to mutual negative attitudes and suspicion of one another's intentions. One's perceptions

of the other tend to focus on the person's negative qualities and ignore the positives.

3. The parties are unable to effectively divide their work and end up duplicating efforts. When they do divide it, they continuously feel the need to check each other's work.
4. Ongoing disagreement and critical rejection of ideas reduces ` participants' self-confidence as well as confidence in the other parties.
5. The conflicting parties seek to increase their own power and therefore see any increase in the other side's power as a threat.
6. The competitive process fosters the notion that the solution of the conflict can only be imposed by one side on the other. This orientation also encourages the use of coercive tactics such as psychological or physical threats and/or violence. This process tends to expand the range of contested issues and turns the conflict into a power struggle, with each side seeking to win outright. This sort of escalation raises the motivational significance of the conflict for the participants and makes them more likely to accept a mutual disaster rather than a partial defeat or compromise.

When individuals or parties enter into a negotiation process to resolve conflict, they will bring a certain orientation to the table in their effort to settle the conflict. The two most basic orientations people adhere to when entering into negotiations are cooperative or competitive. A cooperative approach aligns with the process of interest-based or integrative bargaining, which leads parties to seek win-win solutions. Disputants that work cooperatively to negotiate a solution are more likely to develop a relationship of trust and come up with mutually beneficial options for settlement. The mutual gains approach is considered a constructive resolution process.

Options for a negotiated settlement are limited in some cases by a fixed pie (a set amount of rewards) that must be divided one way or the other. Such situations leave no alternative for mutual gains and therefore parties must utilize competitive negotiation tactics to pursue their goal(s). Competitive approaches align with the process of distributive bargaining, which result in win-lose outcomes. A competitive approach to conflict tends to increase animosity and distrust between parties and is generally considered destructive.

Researchers have identified five major conflict management styles based on a continuum from Assertive (competitive) to cooperative:

- A competing style: high on assertiveness and low on cooperativeness.
- An accommodating style: low on assertiveness and high on cooperativeness.
- An avoiding style: low on both assertiveness and cooperativeness.
- A collaborating style: high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness.
- A compromising style: moderate on both assertiveness and cooperativeness.

### **Self – Assessment 3.5**

List and discuss the Morton Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The approach or conflict style a negotiator chooses to take when entering negotiations may be based on rational criteria, such as selecting the style that will most likely lead to the desired goals. However, the personalities of the people involved may also play a significant role in which conflict styles are brought to the negotiating table. Thus, it is also possible that some people consistently use a certain style "because they have a personality predisposition to do so."

Despite the very negative picture painted by Deutsch, other theorists emphasize that competition, in some circumstances, can be constructive. Competition in sports, for example, encourages each side to strive for excellence. Although most sporting events are structured in a win-lose sort of way, good sportsmanship norms ensure that the games are played fairly, and in many instances, the loser gets to come back and play again on equal ground.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have studied the two broad theories of conflict approach which are; the Thomas and Kilmann's style of handling conflict along with the interpretation of their mode inventory scores and the Interest based relational approach. We also considered the various effectiveness of cooperation and competition approaches to conflict.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss the Thomas and Kilmann's styles of conflict Management
- Explain when to use each of the 5 styles of conflict management
- Describe the rules and processes in the interest based relationship approach
- Explain the Morton Deutsch's theory of cooperation and competition

## 7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READ

Morton Deutsch, "Cooperation and Competition," in *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, eds. Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 200), 25.

Brake, T., Walker, D. M. & Walker, T. (1995). *Doing business internationally: The guide to cross-cultural success*. New York: Irwin. Ibid, 25-26.

Roy J. Lewicki, David M. Saunders and John W. Minton, *Negotiation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (San Francisco: Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1999), 359.

Roy J. Lewicki, David M. Saunders and John W. Minton, *Negotiation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (San Francisco: Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1999), 358. The other ideas comprising this section were also drawn from this work, pp. 358- 361.

## UNIT 4: COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Why is communication so important
  - 3.2 Communication styles
  - 3.3 The role of empathy in communication
  - 3.4 Tools for better communication

- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

When people are upset, the words they use rarely convey the issues and needs at the heart of the problem. When we listen for what is felt as well as said, we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us.

Research has shown that team satisfaction correlates with a collaborative method of solving conflicts (Liu, Magjuka, & Lee, 2008) and poor communication is usually the cause of conflicts (Johnson, 2004).

We must always remember that when we communicate, it is usually:

- 7% VERBAL: What you said (the message itself)
- 38% VOCAL: How you said it (the intonation, projection and resonance of the voice)
- 55% VISUAL: body language / non verbal

The percentages above shows how much, and more importantly, what people remember after you have spoken

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of communication in conflict management
- Explain the different communication styles
- Discuss the role of empathy in communication
- Explain the communication process

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 WHY IS COMMUNICATION SO IMPORTANT?**

Misunderstandings and conflict have existed since time began. As individuals it is critical that our communication is clear and effective if we are indeed hoping to provide a ministry. We need to recognize that while sin continues on earth, conflict is inevitable. However, consecrating ourselves to God and giving our problems to

Him along with skillful management of our communication efforts can bring about a positive outcome.

**Communication** is the way we interact with fellow humans, the way we get our message across. We communicate with our eyes, faces and bodies as well as our words and voices. Sometimes poor communication is the cause of feuds and fights. Good communication and the ability to manage conflict effectively is a **skill**—one that all of us can learn.

The ability to **interact** successfully and get along with people is a critical ingredient to excellence in people skills. We cannot hope to achieve the kind of people skills we need without God. It is God who can influence our minds and govern our mouths so that those with whom we communicate can sense we care for them and only want their best good. Our Perception of Reality is Not Necessarily Reality

### **Self- Assessment Question 3.1**

Define Communication

## **3.2 THE ROLE OF PERCEPTION**

Quite often, in the course of regular communication, a difference of understanding will arise. Sometimes, even after explanation, the other person cannot see or accept our viewpoint. We cannot understand why. What is the problem; I have explained it to them; how can they possibly not see it my way now?

Perception has a critical role in our interpretation of any given situation. Similarly, this same perception has considerable influence over our reactions to the situation.

Our perception develops, as we grow older, through a **variety of influences** such as our family background, our ethnic background, our age, work experiences, values, and spiritual outlook.etc.

Almost everything affects our perception. Someone who grows up on the farm will have a very different perception of what a busy day is as compared to someone who has grown up in the city. The difference in our backgrounds, education, religious beliefs, and our personal history will affect how clearly we understand each other. The less we understand the meaning of the words, body language, and behavior of the other person, the easier it will be for us to have an inaccurate perception of what they are communicating to us.

We see things not as they are but as we are.

We want to develop our ability to listen well, so that the message **sent** and the message **received** is interpreted for the mutual understanding of both.

Perhaps you have heard the story of a battle ship commander guiding his ship through the night. Seeing a light coming toward them he signaled for the other craft to stand aside. Back came a signal that not only refused to stand aside, but suggested they should be the ones to stand aside instead.

Greatly irritated he signaled back, telling his rank as a commander and demanded that the craft stand aside. Back came the reply, signaled by an ordinary seaman, that they must stand aside.

Affronted he signaled this is a battleship, change your course!

Back came the reply this is a lighthouse, change your course!

We laugh at this little illustration, but we too have often persevered with an argument, a decision, or a course of action based on a faulty perception. How important it is to gather all the information we can and seek to understand where the other person is coming from, before we set our mind on something.

Recognizing our limitations is the basis for taking responsibility for how we think. Taking responsibility for how we think means:

- Challenging the validity of our perceptions
- Challenging the absoluteness of our perceptions
- Challenging the current accuracy of our perceptions

Our patterns or usual behaviors can be logical, considered and mature, or they can be a frequent cause of unsatisfactory communication experiences for us and for those with whom we communicate. If we tend to operate in a “reactive mode” to the circumstances in our life we are actually losing power and control. An example of this would be:

- Being defensive
- Saying something impulsively we later regret
- Giving in and later wishing we had spoken up
- Avoiding an issue that should have been confronted

Can you identify any patterns in your behavior? Anyone brave enough to share?  
Own your perceptions – Don’t let them own you!

- Take responsibility! Own your role in relationships and circumstances
- Choose your responses
- Interrupt reactive patterns

- Don't react –communicate!

### **Self – Assessment Exercise 3.2**

Explain the role of perception in communication

## **3.3 COMMUNICATION STYLES**

We each develop a particular style of communication. Recognizing different styles of communication will help us interact and communicate with people who have very different styles of communication from our own. Do you find that some people are more irritating than others? They are not unpleasant people; they have not done anything wrong; they just do not seem to be on your wavelength. They just have a different style of communicating and it seems strange, maybe even wrong to you! But, they are thinking the same way of your style!

Communication styles can be divided into several different groups. Consider these brief descriptions:

### **3.3.1 THE DIRECTOR**

You know this type of person, perhaps it might even be you—they are impatient, they want everything done yesterday. They even speak quickly, often using short forms of language such as “ASAP” (As Soon As Possible). They are direct in their communication—say what they think—sometimes abrasively. They are often to be found in leadership positions. Keep in mind that this person thinks in terms of projects that need to be completed—if they trample over you it's unlikely that they intended too—they sometimes forget that others care about the process as much as the completed project. Realizing the difference helps you to not personalize what “The Director” often does without even being aware that they may be hurting or stepping on someone.

### **3.3.2 THE PARTY PERSON**

Another outgoing type, these people are friendly, optimistic and informal. They enjoy life and they communicate clearly. They are energetic and creative—give them opportunity to establish their goals and visions and don't dampen their enthusiasm. These individuals often forget that the party is not all about them and will be oblivious to you at times. Again, don't take this personally. Just realize

that you might have to be more persistent, gently so, for information that you deem as critical.

### **3.3.3 THE STABILIZER.**

A quiet person, shy, but friendly. A wonderful support person, loyal and caring—they have difficulty in saying no. Give them space to speak and don't interrupt. Because they are quiet don't ignore them or assume they have nothing to contribute. Involve them with requests for comments or their help.

### **3.3.4 THE ACCOUNTANT**

Every team needs this quiet, conscientious, attention-to-detail person. They are systematic and attend to the details involved with finances and filing. As with the stabilizer, involve this person and give them the opportunity to share their knowledge and ideas. This person will respond best when they can sense that there is structure and framework to what you are trying to accomplish.

Each of these four types is valuable to the team. Each type has its strengths and weaknesses. As a leader, get to know each member of your team and learn to appreciate the varied strengths they bring. Listen to their communication style—don't dismiss them because they are quiet, don't take offence because they are direct to the point of being blunt. Learn to work with them, to involve them and appreciate them. The single most critical component that makes teamwork possible is effective communication" (Jones, Oyung, & Pace, 2005:18).

### **Self –Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Describe the different communication styles in brief.

## **3.4 THE ROLE OF EMPATHY IN COMMUNICATION**

Empathy is **sensing** another's feelings and attitudes as if we had experienced them ourselves. Being able to be empathetic toward the person we are communicating with will open wide the channel of communication – and understanding. Empathy is learning to listen with your head and your heart

### **3.4.1 CREATING EMPATHY BY WHAT WE THINK**

We need to recognize that people are able to sense what we really think about them. Even though we may be skilled at acting a part, inevitably the truth will come out, and if we do not genuinely have respect for someone they will sense this. The way we think about the other person will communicate itself to them, thus enhancing or seriously jeopardizing our chance for effective communication. Let us now consider some tips that will enhance our communication;

- **Take seriously the other person's needs and concerns.** We may think these needs and concerns are inappropriate or unimportant—but they are real to that person, and as such, we need to take them seriously.
- **We must value their right to their feelings and attitudes,** which are the result of their life's experiences. We may not be able to relate to their feelings and attitudes, but it's important to relate to them as people.
- **Their privacy, values and experiences** may be foreign to us, even unacceptable, but they are integral to the other person's viewpoint. Our goal is to understand how they are perceiving things. We do not have to be afraid that this means we are agreeing with them or condoning what they are trying to do. We are simply keeping the lines of communication open.
- **Reserve judgment and blame.** This is important if we are to achieve a worthwhile outcome. When people sense they are judged (or even blamed) by you, and particularly if they believe they may be found wanting, they are much less likely to want to hear what you have to say.

### 3.4.2 CREATING EMPATHY BY WHAT WE DO

While what we actually think can be communicated subconsciously to the other person and therefore reduce or enhance the build up of empathy between you and the other person, what we actually do is even more obvious and is influenced by our thoughts about the person. Be **aware** of and **respectful** of any cultural differences. Let us now consider some actions that will enhance our communication;

- **Look** at the person and take an active **interest** in what they are saying when communicating.
- Ask relevant **questions** for **clarification**. If you allow your concentration to fade, so that it becomes obvious you have not been listening, or, if others distract you constantly, you are signaling to the person that what they are saying is not of great interest to you.
- Use **open** body language—make and hold eye contact, face the person—lean forward a little and avoid crossed arms. If the situation is difficult—try

to find a quiet place and sit down rather than stand. (Never stand if that other person is sitting).

- Be very aware of **facial expression**—have a pleasant expression—smile! And try not to frown even if you are concentrating.
- Make **affirming** gestures - such as nod and sounds of agreement at appropriate intervals.
- Use a **warm** vocal tone. Listen to your voice; don't let it become intimidating, cold, flat or screechy; don't raise it if the conversation doesn't go as you had planned. Try to keep your voice warm and encouraging.

### 3.4.3 EMPATHY BLOCKERS

Certain words or phrases block empathy instantly. Sometimes we use them without realizing the damage they can do. When we have finished using these thoughtless expressions we have often lost our chance to communicate to the other person. Let us now consider some examples below;

#### **Domination**

Threatening	If you are not able to get to work on time we will have to review your job here.
Ordering	Do it or else I will see you immediately in my office.
Criticizing	You don't work hard enough.
Name Calling	Only an idiot would say that. You are neurotic.
Should'ing	You should have said no.... You ought to face the facts....

These two examples slip out of our mouths easily, but they are quite destructive to a developing relationship.

#### **Manipulation**

Withholding relevant Information.	If you knew more about this, you would see it differently. Issues of confidentiality make this a difficult one, but if you can not share
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the information, it is probably better not to mention it at all.

Interrogating

How many hours did this take you?

Praising to Manipulate

You are so good at report writing; I would like you to do this one.

### **Disempowerment**

Diagnosing motives

You are very possessive.

Untimely advice

If you would just straighten up your desk you would not be in this panic.

Changing the topic

I am worried about my son. Yes, it is a worry; did I tell you I have got a new job?

### **Denial**

**Refusing to address the issue**

There is nothing to discuss, I cannot see any problems.

We tend to think that the words we communicate to someone are the bulk of our communication. We could not be more wrong!

### **Self- Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Explain how we can create Empathy by what we think and do?

## **3.5 TOOLS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION**

Communication is congruent when: What we SAY and what we DO match.

We have to remember:

1. Much of what we communicate is unconscious
2. Much of what we communicate is unintentional
3. Much of what we communicate is incongruent

For example if I were to stand here like this (wring hands, no smile, with my voice trembling as I stare at the floor more than the people) and then say: I am so excited to be here! Would I be very believable to you? (Now do the same but look and act excited!)

### **3.5.1 TIPS ON HOW TO BECOME A GOOD LISTENER:**

- Listen to the reasons the other person gives for being upset.
- Make sure you understand what the other person is telling you—from his or her point of view.
- Repeat the other person's words, and ask if you have understood correctly.
- Ask if anything remains unspoken, giving the person time to think before answering.
- Resist the temptation to interject your own point of view until the other person has said everything he or she wants to say and feels that you have listened to and understood his or her message.

**When listening to the other person's point of view, the following practical responses are often helpful:**

**Encourage** the other person to share his or her issues as fully as possible.

For example I want to understand what has upset you. Or I want to know what you are really hoping for.

**Clarify** the real issues, rather than making assumptions. Ask questions that allow you to gain this information, and which let the other person know you are trying to understand. For example, Can you say more about that? Or Is that the way it usually happens?

**Restate** what you have heard, so you are both able to see what has been understood so far - it may be that the other person will then realize that additional information is needed. For example It sounds like you were not expecting that to happen.

**Reflect feelings** - be as clear as possible. For example I can imagine how upsetting that must have been.

**Validate** the concerns of the other person, even if a solution is elusive at this time. Expressing appreciation can be a very powerful message if it is conveyed with integrity and respect. For example I really appreciate that we are talking about this issue or I am glad we are trying to figure this out.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Discuss how to improve communication

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Perception colors and influences our understanding and manner of communicating in every situation, and we have each developed set patterns in our behaviors. That is, we often react the same way—for some this can be backing down when we should be more assertive, or tending to overreact when we should obtain more information first. So often, we end up regretting our actions.

A significant factor in improving our communication, reducing conflict and understanding the other person's point of view, is the recognition that our perceptions are always incomplete to some extent, and perhaps even inaccurate. I once heard it said, there is your viewpoint, my viewpoint, and then there is reality!

A motto that many specialists in communication use says it is not what you say – it is how you say it!

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have dealt with the definition of communication and its importance to conflict management. We also considered the following aspects; the role of perception, the various communication styles, the role of empathy in communication and some tools for better communication

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Why is communication important in conflict management
- How do empathy blockers influence Conflict
- Discuss the role of perception in conflict management
- Describe the different communication styles

#### **7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

Jones, R., Oyung, R. & Pace, L. (2005). Reader's guide to: Working virtually: Challenge of virtual teams. Hershey, PA: Cybertech Publishing. Pp 17

Liu, X., Magjuka, R. J., & Lee, S. H. (2008). An examination of the relationship among structure, trust, and conflict management styles in virtual teams.

## **UNIT 5: CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

### **CONTENT**

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Factors Influencing Conflict resolution

3.2	Healthy and unhealthy ways of managing and resolving conflict
3.3	Conflict Resolution Skills
3.4	Effective Principles for Handling Disagreements
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

If you are out of touch with your feelings or so stressed that you can only pay attention to a limited number of emotions, you would not be able to understand your own needs. If you do not understand your deep-seated needs, you will have a hard time communicating with others and staying in touch with what is really troubling you. For example, couples often argue about petty differences—the way she hangs the towels, the way he parts his hair—rather than what is really bothering them.

In personal relationships, a lack of understanding about differing needs can result in distance, arguments, and break-ups. In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes. When you can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships. When you resolve conflict and disagreement quickly and painlessly, mutual trust will flourish.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss factors influencing conflict resolution
- Explain the different conflict resolution skills
- Healthy ways to respond to conflict
- Understand and apply the effective principles for handling disagreements

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING CONFLICT RESOLUTION**



When conflict does arise will you always have time to think about the above process and work it through step by step? NO! The key is to begin to incorporate the principles and practice them on a regular basis – let them become a part of who you naturally are. When you are in a conflict situation you can always tell yourself to STOP! This will help you to not react quickly and will give you a few mental seconds to begin processing the situation in a more controlled way.

### **Self- Assessment Exercise 3.1**

List and describe the factors which influence conflict resolution

## **3.2 HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY WAYS OF MANAGING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT**

Conflict triggers strong emotions and can lead to hurt feelings, disappointment, and discomfort. When handled in an unhealthy manner, it can cause irreparable rifts, resentments, and break-ups. But when conflict is resolved in a healthy way, it increases our understanding of one another, builds trust, and strengthens our relationship bonds.

Unhealthy responses to conflict are characterized by:

- An inability to recognize and respond to matters of great importance to the other person
- Explosive, angry, hurtful, and resentful reactions
- The withdrawal of love, resulting in rejection, isolation, shaming, and fear of abandonment
- The expectation of bad outcomes
- The fear and avoidance of conflict

Healthy responses to conflict are characterized by:

- The capacity to recognize and respond to important matters
- A readiness to forgive and forget

- The ability to seek compromise and avoid punishing
- A belief that resolution can support the interests and needs of both parties

### **Self- Assessment Exercise 3.2**

Why is it necessary to have health responses to conflict?

## **3.3 CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS**

The ability to successfully manage and resolve conflict depends on four key skills. Together, these four skills form a fifth skill that is greater than the sum of its parts: the ability to take conflict in stride and resolve differences in ways that build trust and confidence.

### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL 1: QUICKLY RELIEVE STRESS**

The capacity to remain relaxed and focused in tense situations is a vital aspect of conflict resolution. If you do not know how to stay centered and in control of yourself, you may become emotionally overwhelmed in challenging situations. The best way to rapidly and reliably relieve stress is through the senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. But each person responds differently to sensory input, so you need to find things that are soothing to you.

### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL 2: RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS.**

Emotional awareness is the key to understanding yourself and others. If you do not know how you feel or why you feel that way, you would not be able to communicate effectively or smooth over disagreements. Although knowing your own feelings may seem simple, many people ignore or try to sedate strong emotions like anger, sadness, and fear. But your ability to handle conflict depends on being connected to these feelings. If you are afraid of strong emotions or if you insist on finding solutions that are strictly rational, your ability to face and resolve differences will be impaired.

### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL 3: IMPROVE YOUR NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

The most important information exchanged during conflicts and arguments is often communicated nonverbally. Nonverbal communication includes eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, posture, touch, and gestures. When you are in the middle of a conflict, paying close attention to the other person's nonverbal signals may help you figure out what the other person is really saying, respond in a way that builds trust, and get to the root of the problem. Simply nonverbal signals such as a calm tone of voice, a reassuring touch, or a concerned facial expression can go a long way toward defusing a heated exchange.

#### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL 4: USE HUMOUR AND PLAY TO DEAL WITH CHALLENGES**

You can avoid many confrontations and resolve arguments and disagreements by communicating in a playful or humorous way. Humour can help you say things that might otherwise be difficult to express without creating a flap. However, it is important that you laugh with the other person, not at them. When humour and play are used to reduce tension and anger, reframe problems, and put the situation into perspective, the conflict can actually become an opportunity for greater connection and intimacy.

##### **Self- Assessment 3.3**

List and explain the four conflict resolution skill

#### **3.4 EFFECTIVE PRINCIPLES FOR HANDLING DISAGREEMENTS**

Some principles have contributed greatly to the productive handling of disagreements.

The first, Seek first to understand, then to be understood, was introduced by Steven Covey, in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.<sup>1</sup> If we encourage others to explain their side first, they will be more apt to listen to ours.

For instance, I sometimes need to interview farm personnel about their feelings on various subjects. One day I came across a farm owner who was less than enthusiastic about my project.

It was clear from his words and tone that I would not be interviewing anyone on his farm, so I switched my focus to listening. The farmer shared concerns on a number of troublesome issues and we parted amiably. When I was on my way to my vehicle the farmer yelled, go ahead!

Go ahead and what? I turned around and inquired. To my surprise he responded, Go ahead and interview my workers. The Covey principle was at work.

The second principle, introduced by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their seminal work, says that people in disagreement should focus on their needs rather than on their positions. By concentrating on positions, we tend to underscore our disagreements. When we concentrate on needs, we find we have more in common than what we had assumed. Ury and Fisher suggest we attempt to satisfy the sum of both their needs and our needs.

When the light goes on we realize that it is not a zero sum game (where one person has to lose for the other to win). Nor is it necessary to solve disagreements with a lame compromise. Instead, often both parties can be winners. Individuals can learn how to keep communication lines open and solve challenges when things go wrong. Learning to disagree amicably and work through problems is perhaps one of the most important interpersonal skills we can develop.

The third principle seeks to avoid sharp confrontation. If we come right out and tell someone, I disagree, we are apt to alienate that person. Successful negotiators are more likely to label their intentions, such as a desire to ask a difficult question or provide a suggestion, and are less prone to label disagreement.<sup>3</sup> Problems are likely, however, to increase if we put all our needs aside to focus on another person's perspective. The other party may think we have no needs and be quite taken back when we introduce them all of a sudden, almost as an afterthought. In order to avoid such unproductive shock, I like the idea of briefly saying something along these lines. I see that we look at this issue from different perspectives. While I want to share my needs and views with you later, let me first focus on your thoughts, needs, and observations. At this point, we can now put our needs aside, attempt to truly listen, and say: So, help me understand what your concerns are regarding....

That is the easy part. The difficulty comes in fulfilling such a resolution to really listen to resist the tendency to interrupt with objections no matter how unfounded some of the comments may be. Instead of telling someone that we understand (just so they can finish and give us a turn to present our perspective), we can be much more effective by revealing exactly what it is that we understand. All along we must resist, as we listen, the temptation to bring up our viewpoints and concerns. In trying to comprehend, we may need to put our understanding in terms of a question, or a tentative statement. This way we show true awareness.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

We may have to refine our statement until the other stakeholder approves it as a correct understanding of his position or need. It is necessary not only to

understand, but for the other person to feel understood. Only now can we begin to explain our perspective and expect to be fully listened to. Once we have laid out our concerns, we can focus on a creative solution. If we have had no history with someone, or a negative one, we need to use more caution when disagreeing. The potential for a disagreement to be side-railed into contention is always there. It helps if we have made goodwill deposits over time.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we considered conflict resolution by looking at some factors influencing conflict management, healthy and unhealthy ways of managing conflicts, conflict resolution skills and effective principles for handling conflict.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- In situations of crisis and potential conflict explain what STAR represents
- Discuss how unhealthy responses to others trigger conflict
- List and explain the principles for handling disagreement
- List and discuss the conflict resolution skills

## 7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING

- Covey, S. (1989). *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
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**MODULE 2: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR CONFLICT  
MANAGEMENT**

- Unit 1        The Bible and the Conflict
- Unit 2        Biblical approach to conflict management in the church
- Unit 3        Jesus' teaching on conflict management
- Unit 4        Biblical Reconciliation
- Unit 5        Biblical Teaching on Conflict Avoidance

## **UNIT 1: THE BIBLE AND CONFLICT**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Conflict is Inevitable
  - 3.2 Examples of Conflict in the Bible
  - 3.3 No Conflict is Impossible for God to Resolve
  - 3.4 Jesus and the Art of Conflict Management
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

When you read the Bible from cover to cover, you will notice that there is much writing on the subject of conflict. Numerous examples of conflict are woven into the many stories of people's lives outlined in the scriptures. There is also much wisdom to be gleaned from the Bible on managing conflict. The Book of Proverbs is filled with a wealth of insight on the causes of conflict, dealing with anger, and ending our disagreements with each other. The Bible gives us practical knowledge on the subject of conflict

### **2.0 OBJECTIVE**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate that conflict is inevitable even among Spiritual Christians
- Give examples of conflict in the Bible
- Explain that no conflict impossible for God to handle
- Explain the dangers of conflict avoidance using the story of King David

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE**

Pastors and church leaders resist discussing church conflict. Their resistance often stems from the belief that all conflict is negative and to be avoided, if not ignored, at all costs.

Someone said that conflict is neither good nor evil — only inevitable. The Bible seems to agree. Jesus made it clear that we would experience conflict even as Christians (Luke 17:1). Scripture lays out the proper way to handle conflict, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to deal with conflict competently, yet the church often remains unwilling to learn how to manage its conflicts in a way that will be beneficial to the kingdom of God. Conflict should be viewed as an opportunity to help people grow in faith. Rather than dwelling on the negative aspects of conflict in the church — divisiveness, power plays, and control issues — the church should begin to recognize conflict as the ability and opportunity to create action from inaction.

Conflict is so inevitable for Christians that Paul tells Timothy that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). Many Christians regard being in conflict as being in sin. It is not seen as a normal part of the Christian life. Yet Jesus has taught us, at some length, how to manage conflict and Proverbs has whole sections on it. Conflict is inevitable for three reasons:

- a) Our knowledge is incomplete and imperfect so even sinless people in a perfect world will see the same situation differently through their own knowledge and perspectives.
- b) Satan engineers conflict whenever and wherever possible especially amongst Christians. Satan sets us in conflict with ourselves, God and one another.
- c) We knowingly enter into and initiate conflict with evil whenever we proclaim the gospel, preach holiness, protest against sin in our society, teach against cults or testify to Christ in the midst of a world that does not want to change.

Thus conflict is here to stay and we must learn to manage it in a Christian "Kingdom way" until Christ returns to take us home to heaven where there will be no more crying or sickness or pain.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

Explain why conflict is inevitable

## **3.2 EXAMPLES OF CONFLICT IN THE BIBLE**

We are made to believe that true Christians will never have conflict; this is not true as we will see in the scriptures below.

Look up the Scripture references below, and note the conflict(s) that you find in the text.

No	Scriptural Text	Parties Involved	Nature of Conflict
1	Matthew 5:23-24	Brother or Sister	Unspecified Grudge(s)
2	Matthew 10:34-36	Christian's Family	One believes, others don't
3	Matthew 16:22-23	Jesus v Peter	Jesus' suffering and death
4	Matthew 18:13	Jesus v Disciples	Bring little children
5	Matthew 18:16-18	Church members	Unspecified, perhaps Intense
6	Matthew 20:24	Jesus v Disciples	Jealousy over James and John
7	Matthew 23:1ff	Jesus v. Pharisees	Stubbornness to believe
8	John 8:44	Jesus v Pharisees	Jesus called Satanic
9	Philippians 4:23-24	Euodia v Syntyche	Interpersonal Conflict
10	Acts 15:36-40	Paul v Barnabas	Take/leave John Mark
11	Galatians 1:10	Paul v Galatians	Doubt Paul's Integrity/Authority
12	Galatians 2:11	Paul v Peter	Follow Jewish Rituals?

This shows us that conflict is a normal part of every church's life and the Christian life. Spend a moment and think of any other examples; firstly from the Bible, and then also from your own life. The entire Bible is in some respects a record of conflict--between God and mankind, between all mankind, and between the forces of good and evil. Since the Bible is a record of conflict, it is also a record of forgiveness.

**Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

List and discuss five scriptural passages and show the nature of the conflicts and the parties involved

### **3.3 NO CONFLICT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO RESOLVE**

Sometimes, people refuse to discuss their differences with each other or to seek the help of a mediator because they see no hope in doing this. What is the use? We have been fighting each other for so long, that there is no hope, is what I have had people say to me. Others will say, we have tried everything else and it has not worked? Why should we try mediation?

When people reveal their hopelessness to me, I often share with them these same words that God said to the prophet Jeremiah, to convince them that no conflict is impossible for God to solve: I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for me (Jeremiah chapter 32, verse 27). I try to encourage them to have faith in God and his great power, and allow him to work in their situation while they are having private discussions or going through the process of mediation.

A good example of God's intervention is at Genesis chapter 26, verses 12 to 31, where God helped Abraham's son Isaac resolve his dispute with some Philistine herdsmen. He and the herdsmen had a bitter struggle over some wells Isaac's servants dug for him. Every time Isaac's men dug a well, the Philistine herdsmen would claim that the water it produced was theirs. Because these men fought him over these wells relentlessly, resolution of this problem appeared hopeless to him. But, suddenly, things changed. When his men dug another well, the herdsmen mysteriously chose not to fight them over it. Isaac knew that only God could have brought peace. For this reason, he named the new well Rehoboth, testifying about what God had done for him, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land (Genesis chapter 26, verse 22).

Another example is the story of how God helped Joseph, (the son of Jacob) resolve a very difficult conflict he had with his brothers. In the story, Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, and this led them to throw him in a pit and sell him into slavery (see Genesis chapter 37, verses 1 to 36). Joseph remained a slave in Egypt for thirteen years, until God delivered him out of prison and made him a great ruler. Most of us would have remained bitter, unforgiving and unwilling to consider making peace after suffering as Joseph had. But not Joseph, because of God's grace, he was able to forgive his brothers, and give them food and shelter when they came to him to seek help during a terrible famine (see Genesis chapter 45, verses 1 to 15).

Therefore if God can help resolve a conflict as difficult as this, there is a hope that he can settle any differences we have as well.

### **Self Assessment 3.3**

Discuss two examples to show that God can resolve any kind of conflict

## **3.4 JESUS AND THE ART OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

When Jesus addressed problems, he tackled them head-on. While delivering the Sermon on the Mount (and later in Matthew 18) he dealt with the issue of conflicts brought about either by others offending us or by our offending them: let us now consider some scriptures that show Jesus' response to conflict

Matthew 5:23-24 says Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 18:15-17 says "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

While the Lord was addressing the problem of sin, there are broader principles at work in his teaching. And no matter which side has caused the problem, the solution is the same: First, go to the person with whom you are experiencing a conflict and address the issues face-to-face. Avoid involving a third or fourth person, especially if their knowledge of the situation will worsen the problem for the offending individual. Such discussions tend to intensify the conflict and further undermine the relationship. Judging from the amount of conflict experienced in our world, this is surely one of the most overlooked commands in Scripture.

The fact that we are not appalled by the amount of broken relationships and persistent hostility between people is a sad indicator of our spiritual health as a believing community. The sins we are taught to avoid tend to revolve around lifestyle issues: drinking, smoking, going to the wrong kinds of movies or listening to the wrong kinds of music. But we are not dismayed by a lack of loving relationships. John Ortberg writes about a church-going man he calls "Hank." Hank was filled with complaining and judgment. He was sour and easily irritated. His own children felt distant and unloved by him. Here is Ortberg's main observation:

But even more troubling than his lack of change was the fact that *nobody was surprised by it*. It was as if everyone simply expected that his soul would remain withered and sour year after year, decade after decade. No one seemed bothered by the condition. It was not an anomaly that caused head-scratching bewilderment. No church consultants were called in. No emergency meetings were held to probe the strange case of this person who followed the church's general guidelines for spiritual life and yet was nontransformed.<sup>2</sup>

Yet God abhors this. Our Lord summed up the total teaching of the Old Testament in one word: Love. "Love God and love people," he says. The greater sins, the weightier sins, are transgressions against love. Grudges, gossip, slander – these are done in direct defiance to Jesus' essential command. And these behaviours are tolerated all the time – even among Christians. We do not find them odd; we would find it odd if they suddenly disappeared.

Jesus tells us to first go to the person one-on-one. Second, go to the person quickly. Jesus counselled that, if someone is worshipping God and remembers that he or she has offended a friend, the appropriate response is to stop right there and go immediately to the offended individual. With those words Jesus made it clear that correct interpersonal relationships are more important than correct ritual. This tends to grate against religious folks who say that God must be our first priority. It is true that God should be our primary focus. However, our relationship with God is better gauged by our human relationships than by religious ritual. Although we cannot guarantee that the offended brother will accept us, we are obligated to make every effort "as far as it depends on" us (Romans 12:18).

Interestingly, in both cases, Jesus' advice is to take the initiative. When you have done something wrong, you go and make it right. When someone else has wronged you, you still take the first step. Larry Calvin says:

Now wait just a minute. If your friend has something against you, *you* go to him? And if you have something against your friend, *you* go to him? That has you going to him in both cases, whether you have something against him, or you know he has something against you. When I first made that discovery, I remember thinking: That's not fair! Then I realized that God is not asking us to do anything that he has not already done. You see, God is the initiator in the God-person relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is not asking us to do anything he has not modelled for us. He gave up heaven to come down to earth, became a servant and died to repair our broken relationship with the Father. In Jesus Christ, God takes the initiative. When we come to see how important people are to God, we will value the community

Christ's death makes possible. We will value it enough to take the initiative in resolving relational breakdowns.

Effective leaders do not ignore conflict. They manage it by creating an environment in which people are enabled to work through relational friction on a one-on-one basis. Only after such efforts have failed are others allowed to enter the conflict, and then only for the purpose of bringing about reconciliation.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

While the word *conflict* usually carries a negative connotation, conflict itself does not have to be negative. Often we inappropriately assume that spiritual maturity will lead to fewer conflicts. But Larry Crabb suggests, "The difference between spiritual and unspiritual community is not whether conflict exists, but is rather in our attitude toward it and our approach to handling it."<sup>6</sup>

In his wisdom and sovereignty, God is able to use conflict to accomplish his divine will. In his creation, God is using conflict and pain to produce a greater good. Conflict, if properly managed, can also do this in the context of human relationships. Conflicts can't be avoided, but they can be managed. And a wise leader will devote himself or herself to learning how to do just that.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have considered the fact that conflict is inevitable and no conflict is impossible for God to handle. We also looked at examples of conflict in the Bible, the teachings of Jesus in the Bible on conflict management.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Explain why conflict is inevitable
- List and discuss the nature and parties involved in any five examples of conflict in the Bible
- No conflict is impossible for God to handle. Discuss
- Discuss the dangers of conflict avoidance

#### **7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 2 BIBLICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE CHURCH**

### **CONTENT**

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Understanding Church Conflict

3.2 Stages of Conflict management in the church

3.3 Working with different people in the church

- 3.4 Managing Board Conflict
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Conflict produces energy, and energy can be channelled in positive directions. Apostle Paul gives us the keys to managing conflict with the goal of a positive outcome:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

The critical issue in conflict management – and the one that most strongly influences one’s approach to it – is this: “What will my proper management of this conflict accomplish? Christians who live up to their calling (v. 1) must keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (v. 3); that is the preferred outcome. So how can a godly leader approach conflict so that it cements unity in the church?

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate that conflict in the church is not an abnormality
- Recognise the different stages of conflict in the church
- Work with difficult people in church
- Manage conflict in the church board

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Understanding Church Conflict**

Acts 6:1-7 reminds us that churches are never free from conflict when they are true to their mission, and you will not pastor for long before you discover the need for conflict management.

Conflict in our churches is a reality. Someone said that a church without conflict is probably a church that is dead. Although we tend to be shaken by conflict, in itself conflict is not the real issue. Rather, the issue is whether and how the church

responds to conflict in a way that honours God. Paul asked if we are not even competent to judge trivial cases (1 Corinthians 6:2) and whether nobody is wise enough to judge between believers (verse 5).

Majority of the conflict experienced in churches is the product of changing times rather than creative leadership. Remarkable changes have occurred in the pressures that pastors bear compared to pressures they experienced when their word was seldom questioned and their authority prevailed. Pastors need not be surprised when they find their authority and plans challenged, and they are caught up in a whole storm of protest. It's happening in every institution in our society, including the church.

Let's look at how the apostles handled the first major conflict in the Early Church ( Acts 6:1-7). The Jerusalem church was experimenting in having all things in common. The Grecian widows, who were part of the Dispersion, lived outside Jerusalem and were saying they lived too far away to get a fair share of the goods being divided as the Hebrew widows who lived in Jerusalem. This led to the first major conflict among the brethren after Pentecost. The disciples resolved the conflict by asking the people to raise a committee of faithful men from among them to solve the issue of imbalance sharing of resources. This decision by the Apostles destroyed the potential crisis that would have engulfed the early Christians. We also note from this story that the Apostles did not insult or despise the Grecian widows rather the Apostles concentrated on the issue raised and not who raised the issue. Interestingly the Apostles did not use the situation like many Pastors would today to teach the Grecian Widows contentment because the raised a contentious matter. As a church we must not use religious teaching to deny people their right for justice.

### **Self Assessment 3.1**

Why do we have conflict in the Church?

## **3.2 STAGES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

The apostles followed a 2-stage pattern of conflict management: (1) Desensitization. The widows were allowed to air their complaints, desensitizing the conflict. (2) Deliberation. There was time for serious, mature discussion of the conflict.

Let's take a closer look at how this New Testament formula for the creative management of conflict actually works.

### **3.2.1 Desensitization**

Desensitization requires active involvement by leadership. You cannot constructively manage conflict by continually avoiding or denying it. You cannot say, the problem is not there. And you cannot constructively manage conflict by dominating it or simply forbidding it to happen by saying, we will be in agreement. Do you understand me? That approach would not work.

Instead, you first reassure everyone involved that conflict is normal in any human relationship, and the church is no exception. The ideal of perpetual peace in the church-without conflict-is unscriptural and unrealistic. Remind your people that differing viewpoints are perfectly normal. Emphasize that conflicts occur because people choose to look at matters in different ways, not necessarily because those matters are the way people choose to see them.

If you are going to be a master at handling desensitization, you cannot be ego-involved by seeing a situation only your unique way. If you say well, this is the way God has shown it to me, and this is the way it is going to be, you are not going to desensitize anything. Rather, you will only intensify it, because you have made debating the position you have taken equal to debating with God.

Before you get too ego-involved in declaring your divine revelation, listen to what the Lord may be saying to others. The apostles let the Hebrew and Grecian widows express their feelings before they went to the next stage of conflict management. Why? Once anxiety is reduced, a broader perspective can be taken. In almost any situation, the Holy Spirit can lead us to many alternatives. Desensitization involves helping people see several different ways of viewing a set of circumstances. After people's feelings have been sufficiently surfaced and aired, move to the second stage of conflict management.

### **3.2.2 DELIBERATION**

Consider the various points of view. In trying to help His disciples overcome their tendency to fear, Jesus said, Fear not. Perhaps He was giving them the opportunity to have the broadest possible range of alternatives.

Christ wants a congregation to be open to any creative direction the Spirit of God may want to bring. But when church members and church leaders commit themselves to an ego-involved position, their anxiety that they may be proven

wrong frequently builds rigid defences that get in the way of God leading them the way He wants them to go.

Occasional personality conflicts between segments of the congregation and the pastor can affect the pastor's influence.. People who refuse to engage in sincere, mature mediation while respecting the position of the pastor need to be seen for what they are and dealt with decisively as possible ( 3 John 9-12 for the scriptural precedent).

John evidently felt he had been patient enough with Diotrephes—a man who had a long history of being difficult to deal with in the church. John showed the church what he, as their pastor, believed to be the model of a good man (Demetrius) and what he believed to be the model of an evil man (Diotrephes). Then he told them to avoid being like Diotrephes but to follow those who had a good report among them.

Paul was not quite as patient as John. As a pastor I frequently found Paul a great comfort to my heart, especially when I read his prayer for Alexander: Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works (2 Timothy 4:14).

The extreme action needed to deal with this kind of person should be rare in the life of a church. Most people—dealt with in love and patience, will move through conflict satisfactorily.

Many people who cause disturbances in churches tend to be paranoid in their personalities—tending to feel either persecuted or messianic. Most congregations will have a person or two like this. If you try to nail them to a cross, you'll wind up with the marks in your own hands. And if you try to follow them in their messianic moments, it would not be long before the take over pastoring the church.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

Explain the concept of Desensitization and deliberation

## **3.3 WORKING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH**

Paranoid people want prominence and power. Allowing them to have both will be disastrous for them and the church. God loves them and wants to help them, and pastors can help them best by allowing them to have prominence—without power. What positions would most likely fit this description in your church? Soloists? Choir members? Hostesses? Ushers? Such positions have legitimate tasks that need to be done in every congregation. Put paranoid people in places where they are out in the public—where they are seen and feel important. However, God help you if

they get on your board or become your worship leader or Christian education director!

Why put them in positions of prominence? Because if you can find them a position of prominence without power, your congregation will see what you see, and the disruptive efforts of the paranoid people in your church will be contained. They would not be making decisions or sitting on committees.

Remember, though, even people who recognize such people for who they are will resent you if you attack paranoid members. Why? Because, the position of pastor is supposed to be above that kind of behaviour. Ask God to help you separate your feelings from your sense of responsibility in these situations. This will enable you to act from your position as pastor and spiritual leader of the congregation, instead of from your personal feelings.

Provide prominence without power, trusting that the people of God will keep leadership where it belongs: in the hands of responsible, mature believers. At the same time, help your congregation love disruptive people enough to allow the body of Christ to provide what therapy can be accomplished in their hearts and minds.

If certain people have only caused you difficulty, you may be the one who needs to change. Check with other pastors who've had to work with them, and see if they caused problems in other churches. Find out how they functioned in previous situations of leadership and power. This is one way fellow pastors can cooperate and help each other.

One of the things I learned when I was building a church staff is that you are not really pulling off such a coup when you hire a staff person from another church without first talking to that senior pastor. You may simply be answering his or her prayers for deliverance!

### **3.3.1 Disruptive, Manipulative People**

When you have to deal with a disruptive, manipulative person on your staff or in your church, remember that such a person will see your kindness as stupidity. He or she will try to make your attempts at reason and reconciliation look like evidence of weakness. And your prolonged patience will be seen as an extended opportunity to manipulate and exploit the circumstances. If you find yourself caught in the throes of a person's critical attempt to disrupt the church, it is important to keep your program going as though nothing had happened—including those justifiable features which may be under irresponsible attack. Do not publicize conflict. The truth will come out eventually.

Mature members of the church will, in time, see the wisdom of what Paul admonished the church at Rome to do: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them

which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple [innocent] (Romans 16:17,18).

By your words and deeds teach your people what good leadership looks like. And keep your hand on all levels of the leadership-selection process in your church. This is how you sustain—and at the same time contain—those unhealthy people in your congregation. Pray that exposure to the properly functioning body of Christ will bring healing to them before they can damage the cause of Christ. If you are for something, a person like this will be against it. They will be against enough things that the people in the congregation will observe it and still love the person, but they will have better sense than to elect the disruptive, manipulative person to a position of leadership in the church.

### **3.3.2 Disruptive, Argumentative People**

Disruptive, argumentative people will make your board or committee meetings even more difficult than they would otherwise be. They will want to override every other point of view during your times of deliberation and control the decisions you reach as a group. Save yourself a headache by keeping these kinds of people in positions of prominence—without power.

During your deliberation of conflict-laden church business, encourage free discussion of the issues with all parties involved. In your board meetings and in your departmental and committee meetings, encourage differing viewpoints. You can do this easily by being careful how you respond to someone who has given an opposing point of view. Say to this person in the group meeting, Thank you for sharing from your standpoint. Now, let's hear from someone else. Try not to move into any planning meeting with such tightly defined and preconceived plans that there is no room for other opinions. Have the understanding with your board and your department heads that these meetings are the place and the time when different viewpoints should be aired and explored for whatever creative advantage they may have over the plan as initially presented.

Others present may have valid opinions that need to be heard. Remember, you are looking for the best plan. When there are honest differences, let them be expressed in these kinds of meetings, to help the group reach a decision that represents the maximum Kingdom potential.

### **3.3.3 Timid Laypeople**

Laypeople with honest convictions are prone to sit too quietly in departmental planning meetings and on church boards, whether because of their own timidity or because of overpowering leadership. They often leave without expressing their real feelings during the meeting. What do they do? When they get out of the meeting, they are likely to say, I did not really agree with what the board decided. In trying to avoid the momentary discomfort of an honest difference of opinion, they have created a longer, deeper discomfort by saying the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time in the wrong place and in the wrong way.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

What is the best approach to difficult people in the church?

## **3.4 MANAGING BOARD CONFLICT**

Ever feel like firing your board? If so, this section will provide 10 tips that can help you manage conflict with your board before it paralyzes your church. The tips are as follows:

### **1. Clearly Define The Role Of The Board Member.**

One of the easiest ways to reduce conflict is to state clearly to potential board members what you expect from them. Many conflicts come from a board member who has an ill-conceived idea of his role — ranging from a feeling of powerlessness (I'm simply a puppet) to a feeling of control (I know what is best for the church). By giving written guidelines for board members to review before committing to the board, expectations of membership are clearly set.

### **2. Look For Potential Areas Of Conflict Before The Meeting.**

Take time to evaluate agenda items before they are presented. Talk with board members separately to evaluate their positions. If you know someone on the board may have a problem with a proposal, seek the individual's counsel in advance. Even if you disagree, this will give you an opportunity to identify possible solutions to the areas of potential conflict.

### **3. Clarify Responsibilities When Assigning Projects.**

It is important to clarify exactly what is expected and to receive input from the board member regarding what he expects so that he can take ownership

of the assignment. Assumptions are often made before, during, and after board meetings regarding the extent to which a job is expected to be done.

#### **4. Listen To Your Board**

How often do we decide to start talking about what we want without hearing what the other side wants us to hear? Even when pretending to listen, we are usually preparing what we are going to say next and do not even hear what is being said. Take active steps to let board members know you are listening to them. If you feel your board is not listening to you, first seek to hear what they are saying before assigning blame or trying to force them into a position they might not be ready to accept. They might see a negative side to a situation that you did not see.

#### **5. Separate The Personality From The Problem.**

Have you ever had a board member whose personality is different from yours? He usually is the most vocal of all the board members (at least it seems that way). This problem can be accentuated by the fact the individual can make statements and even questions sound like accusations. Rather than going on the defensive when an issue arises, focus on the solution to the problem. Analyze the issue rather than the individual.

#### **6. Avoid A Battle Of The Wills.**

Many conflicts degenerate into a battle of wills when people seemingly become entrenched in irreconcilable positions. When a conflict first surfaces, focus on the underlying goal that all want to see accomplished. If you have a contentious item, work on other items that may help to resolve the more difficult situation. Above all, avoid insults or implications that challenge integrity, intelligence, and/or motives.

#### **7. Endeavour To Hear All Sides Of A Conflict.**

Rarely does a major conflict have a solution acceptable to all. However, if an effort is made to hear all sides of a conflict, a course of action can at least be explained based on all the information presented. If in a later meeting someone tries to revive the issue, answers can be provided based on the board discussion, thus reducing conflicts over the issue.

### **8. Determine Why You Feel There Is A Conflict.**

Many conflicts are a matter of perception or escalate because someone has not thought it through. The advice to count to 10 before responding to someone in anger is good, but we should go a step further and ask if the situation is worth engaging in a conflict at all. Is there a conflict because you did not get your way? Or is it a conflict because you left out information needed to make a decision? Only by asking the question can you get the answer.

### **9. Do Not Take Comments About Ideas Personally.**

It is difficult to engage in debate over matters that are near the heart. Many take comments personally or react to criticism as if it is an attack on the individual. Over a period of time this results in a feeling of rejection that can lead to taking sides in a perceived conflict.

### **10. Consider Enlisting The Help Of A Third Party.**

If a conflict becomes too difficult to resolve, do not be afraid to ask for help. Don't succumb to the idea that you can handle everything or that the conflict will simply go away. Seek help from fellow pastors or from a lawyer trained in conflict resolution.

How do we address the issue of conflict and discipline in the church? One option is the formation of a conflict resolution committee with individuals trained to help church members resolve their disputes in compliance with the standard of Scripture rather than simply the law of man. A peacemaker committee ideally would have the same status as the most important committees of the church and be under the direct supervision of the senior pastor. A committee of this nature could take many forms, but some commonalities of such a committee should be considered for constructively resolving conflicts.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Discuss five ways of preventing conflict within the church board

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Somehow we get deceived into believing that God can not be in an honest confrontation or difference of opinion; God can only be in peace and tranquillity. Churches can suffer from such mismanagement of conflict.

Mismanagement of conflict in difficult situations also occurs at higher levels of leadership because people hesitate to speak up. We need to avoid this trap at every level of the church. Remember, the devil does not fear a big church. He fears a united church. Only when differences can be expressed in an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance can a truly church-unifying point of view be discovered and defined. Mastering this process is leadership at its best.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we considered the Biblical approach to conflict management in the church by looking at understanding church conflict, stages of conflict management, working with difficult people in the church and managing board conflict

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Does Conflict exist in the church?
- Have you Experienced conflict in the church? How did you resolve the conflict
- Explain the Apostles pattern of conflict management
- Discuss how you will work with difficult people in the church
- List and discuss seven (7) ways of managing conflict in the church board

## **7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

## **UNIT 3 JESUS' TEACHING ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT (MATTHEW 18:15-16)**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content

- 3.1 Context of Matt 18:15-16
- 3.2 How to approach a sinning brother
- 3.3 Practical steps for reconciling with an erring brother
- 3.4 Reasons for privately reproofing a brother
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Professing Christians desire peace in the body of Christ. Many acknowledge that peace and purity can only be maintained through biblical church discipline. Matthew 18:15 following is a crucial passage for preserving the peace and concord of believers, because in it, Christ sets forth the steps necessary for dealing with sin between believers. Although this portion of Scripture is often referred to in our day by believers, it is seldom followed by church governors and members. Therefore, let us carefully consider these words spoken by Christ, and put them into practice. Sin and conflict in the church are inevitable. But, if we handle sin Christ's way: peace, sanctification and the preserving of reputations will be the result. If we handle sin our way, we can expect chaos, warfare and divisions in the church.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the context of Matthew 18: 15-16
- Constructively approach an erring brother
- Reconcile with an erring brother
- Know how to reprove an erring brother

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 CONTEXT OF THE TEXT**

Before we examine the text, let us first note the context. These verses which deal with a sinning brother are given within a section of teaching that deals with concern for the little ones of the kingdom, saving lost sheep, forgiving our brethren and so on. All of chapter 18 was spoken at one time in one discourse by Jesus

Christ. Christ's Galilean ministry was coming to a close. This was Jesus' final visit to Capernaum. This whole discourse arose out of the disciples' faulty concept of the kingdom and the disciples' egotistical concern of who out of themselves would be the greatest or most exalted one in Christ's coming kingdom, which in their minds at this time, was a kingdom of earthly glory and power.

Jesus focuses their attention away from themselves and personal glory, to humility, to a concern for the little ones of the kingdom, to hatred of sin, and to reconciliation and forgiveness. Greatness in Christ's kingdom is not anything like greatness according to the world. It is not to be a great lord, pope or bishop, ruling over the flock like a dictator or mighty general, but it is to be as a little child who sits upon our saviour's lap in humble trust, dependence and love for Him.

The rest of chapter 18 follows this theme of true greatness through humility and concern for God's people: God's little ones. There is a need to guard and protect the little ones and ourselves from stumbling (verses 6-9). There is the need to rescue the little ones who stumble, to consider them precious and to seek them out when they stray (verses 10-14). There is a need to confront the sinning brother in a humble, loving manner. And not to give up, but follow every step necessary to win him to repentance (verses 15-20). And in response to Peter's question, Christ discusses the need to forgive the repentant brother (verses 22-35). Our text logically follows the passage regarding rescuing the straying brother as well as logically precedes the section on forgiving our brother.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

What is the background of Matthew 18: 15-16

## **3.2 HOW TO APPROACH A SINNING BROTHER**

First, you are to approach your brother in a spirit of Christian love and humility. You are to go as a physician to a patient or as a Shepherd goes after lost sheep. Philippians 2:3-4 says: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others. You do not go to your brother to punish and humiliate but to help and to save. Receiving personal justice and satisfaction for our hurt feelings takes second place to seeing our brother repent. Any professing believer who takes a gleeful satisfaction in the downfall and public humiliation of other professing Christians is not acting in accordance with the spirit of love, concern, and humility which runs throughout chapter 18.

Second, you are to go and point out your brother's sin in a calm rational manner. You are there to convince, to win over your brother. You will almost certainly not succeed at your task if you lose control of your temper and insult or mock your brother. Acting like an arrogant jerk is not the way to convince anyone. Christian reproof is an ordinance of Christ for bringing sinners to repentance. Remember, this is your brother for whom Christ died. No matter what he has done, place him above yourself. Do not act in an unseemly manner or in any way that would unnecessarily jeopardize your mission.

Third, although our text assumes that actual sin has been committed, no matter how convinced in your own mind of the justice of your cause, you must carefully listen to and weigh your brother's argument. (This assumes of course that he does not immediately agree with you and repent.) Christians have been mistaken on many occasions; therefore, you must carefully examine your brother's case. You must consider the possibility that your accusation may be a mistake. Even if you believe that you have an open and shut case, you must give your brother a thorough opportunity to respond. The one raising the issue must be prepared (have a mind set) to hear new evidence, and show a willingness to give his brother the benefit of the doubt. In effect, he says, Here are the data that I have, now let me hear your side of the story. Colossians 3:12-13: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Fourth, you are to go alone; that is, in private. Christ has set up a very good rule in His church for His people that Christians should not speak of our brother's faults to others, 'till we have first spoken about them to that person personally, and privately. Proverbs 11:13: "A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter." Proverbs 26:20: "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases." There are a number of reasons that going alone is the best and most biblical course of action.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

What should be the attitude of a Christian who is in a position to correct another Christian?

### **3.3 PRACTICAL STEPS IN RECONCILING WITH AN ERRING BROTHER**

Let us now examine the first step in reconciliation with a brother who sins against you. Verse 15 says: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” There are several things to note regarding this verse.

First, note that Christ is speaking about a brother. Therefore, this passage only applies to Christians, to believers. If an unbeliever sins against you, biblically you are not obligated to seek reconciliation with him. However Paul does say: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” (Romans 12:18) Christians should do everything possible within the parameters of God’s law to get along with the heathen. And of course believers should not speak Evil and hate unbelievers. But, unbelievers are not part of the body of Christ and are not under the authority of the church. Thus, the three-step pattern of church discipline does not apply to them. In the world, unbelievers often sin against Christians. And often the best thing for the Christian to do is to just forget about it and move on. But when a Christian brother sins against you in such a way that simply cannot be covered over with love—ignoring the sin is not an option. Sin must be dealt with or it will eventually destroy the purity and peace of the church.

Second, note that Christ is talking about sin. “If a brother sins....” The Greek word used is hamartia which literally means to miss the mark. The mark or standard missed is God’s holy law. Jesus uses the aorist tense which indicates a specific act of sinning. To paraphrase the intent of the original language we could say: “If a Christian brother clearly misses the mark so that his conduct toward you is a violation of God’s holy law, go and tell him his fault, etc.”

The fact that Christ is discussing real sin, an actual violation of God’s law is important for two reasons.

- 1.) It means that Christians should not take offense over personality differences, cultural differences and socioeconomic differences and so on. Furthermore, there are many offenses that occur in life that may not be directly the result of sin. Some Christians are offended over trivial matters that are not sins at all. Proverbs 10:12 says: ‘Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers a multitude of sins.’ Plainly every rub and offense cannot be raised and settled. We must learn in love, to forgive and pass by many slights, annoyances and offenses.” Jay Adams said “Much heart breaking and much needless trouble often comes of ‘offenses’ which exist only in the imagination. A ‘sensitive’ disposition is often only another name for someone who is uncharitable, un-forgiving, and suspicious of others without real cause. The professing believer who has a judgmental, suspicious spirit often is guilty of imputing bad motives to others where

none exist, and of finding sinister—malevolent meanings in the most innocent acts.”John Gibson said God saves all sorts of people, people who you may think are weird, odd, strange, or whatever. Remember, Christ is talking about sin.

- 2.) The fact that Christ is talking about real sin means that personal charges against a brother must be objectively proved from the Bible. Here Christ protects believers from legalism, subjectivism and all arbitrary human standards. Thus, if you are going to go to your brother and accuse him of sin you better make sure it is a real sin and not some subjective feeling, etc. If someone accuses you of sin and you aren't sure of what you did wrong, ask for scriptural proof. This principle seems rather obvious, yet, it is constantly violated in churches today. People are chided and harassed for many things that have nothing to do with sin and everything to do with legalistic, subjective nonsense. Christ is talking about sin. If offenses are not based on God's law but only upon human opinion or imagination, this should be discovered during the three-step judicial process.

Third, note that the sin committed is personal, that it is against you (singular). Christ is discussing private offenses and not public sins. If the sin is committed against you alone, or if you observe a brother commit a sin in private, then you are required to keep the matter private and go to your brother, etc. Public sins are handled in a different manner. A sin that is public and known by the whole church requires a public rebuke and repentance. The expression against you distinguishes between secret and open sins. John Calvin says: “For if any man shall offend against the whole Church, Paul enjoins that he be publicly reprov'd, so that even elders shall not be spared; for it is in reference to them that he expressly enjoins Timothy, to rebuke them publicly in the presence of all, and thus to make them a general example to others, (1 Tim v. 20). And certainly it would be absurd that he who has committed a public offense, so that the disgrace of it is generally known, should be admonished by individuals; for, if a thousand persons are aware of it, he ought to receive a thousand admonitions. The distinction, therefore, which Christ expressly lays down, ought to be kept in mind, that no man may bring disgrace upon his brother by rashly, and without necessity, divulging secret offenses.”<sup>5</sup>

There is a principle gathered from this passage regarding the extent to which the sins of other believers may be discussed with others who have not witnessed any sinful behaviour. Unless a sin is of such a gross scandalous nature that makes it an inevitable public scandal (e.g., murder, civil crimes, etc.); then, if a sin is witnessed by a small circle of believers, these believers

should deal with the problem privately and not spread the matter before the whole church. The Bible indicates that a sin ought to be confessed as widely as the sin's direct effects extend (Matt. 18:15). Furthermore, if a sin is committed before two to three people the matter is already at step number two; for there is no need to gather witnesses. If the small group of people cannot achieve reconciliation, they may go directly to the elders of the church.

A second principle or application regarding the personal nature of the offense "against you" regards busybodies. If a Christian overhears a conversation between two believers in which he thinks something offensive was said by one believer to another, it is the person's responsibility to whom the statement was directed to either overlook the matter in love or confront the person who made the statement. The person who overheard the conversation has no business taking offense and spreading the matter around the church when the person to whom the statement was made has not taken offense and would like to drop the matter altogether. If you believe that a brother is covering a sin that is so serious that you think it needs to be dealt with, then go to him privately and discuss it. But Christians who go about the church and meddle in affairs that should not concern them are gossips and busybodies and unnecessarily disturb the peace of Christ's church.

Fourth, note the offended brother is to go and confront the brother who sinned alone. "You, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." (vs. 15) This is the first command in our text. This is a divine imperative from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the three-step procedure for dealing with a brother who has committed sin is not optional for believers. These are not suggestions. These are not just words of advice. Every Christian, every elder, every pastor and every church court must strictly obey Christ's instructions. No excuse is acceptable for violating this passage.

The verb (elegxon) translated in various translations as convict, tell, reprove, or show, means to rebuke so as to bring conviction. One is to rebuke or confront with the purpose of bringing sin home to the conscience; to awaken the person to a consciousness of guilt.

One thing important to note regarding Christ's command to go, is that the offended party is responsible to go. You do not wait for the offending brother to come to you. You must seek him out and speak directly to him. If you are the one who has been wronged, why does Christ demand that you take the initiative? Because Christian love always regards the welfare of a brother as more important than oneself. Remember, the whole context of

our passage is humility and concern for the little ones of the kingdom. Christ has just spoken about the lost sheep and about the need to go to great lengths to rescue the one stray lamb.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Discuss the three steps of reproving a Christian brother

## **3.4 REASONS FOR PRIVATELY REPROVING A BROTHER**

The first reason for reproving your brother in private is to protect the reputation of your brother. It is natural for earthly, blood brothers to look out for each other's welfare and to be concerned about each other's reputation. Earthly brothers often go out of their way to squash gossip and rumours that besmirch the reputation of another family member.

As Christians we often fail to recognize the importance and significance of our brotherhood in Christ. Earthly brothers are held together by blood, by parentage. But Christian brothers are one in Jesus Christ, regenerated and brought together by the Spirit of God. Our relationship to each other is spiritual, permanent and is a public testimony of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Speaking of those who clothed, fed and gave water to His people, Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). Christ so identifies Himself with His body, the church, that to care for His people is to care for Him; that to persecute His people is to persecute Him; that to ignore the needs of His people is to ignore Him. Thus for believers to ignore Christ's command to go privately to our brother and seriously damage his reputation through gossip is a great sin. It shows a lack of love and concern for our brother. You must show more of a concern for the reputation of your brother than even for your own reputation. 1 John 3:14-15: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Woe unto you Christian if you ignore Christ's command and damage the reputation of your brother for whom Christ died.

The second reason why you need to go to your brother privately is to protect your own reputation. Christians are not infallible. Sometimes Christians are totally wrong concerning the behaviour of a brother. Believers have heard things wrongly, misunderstood statements and actions and so on. Sometimes Christians have a poor knowledge of God's word and law, and regard things to be sins which are not sins at all. Thus, if you go to your brother privately and discuss the matter and discover

that your perception and/or accusation is wrong, then you can ask for forgiveness (if necessary) and reconcile. The issue is settled right there, privately, and no harm of bad reputation comes to you or your neighbour. If one does not follow Christ's command and spreads false and damaging information around the church about a brother, then whose reputation will be seriously damaged when the truth is discovered? The accuser's! The accuser will suffer a loss of trust and credibility in the congregation. Thus the accuser's ability to admonish others and minister in the body will be curtailed until trust is restored.

A third reason to go to your brother privately is to preserve the peace of the church. Often when accusations are levelled against a brother behind his back and spread throughout the church and the accuser and accused disagree, factions will develop within the church. People have a tendency to take sides in a dispute. When supporters of the accused and the accuser become agitated and angry against each other, often it results into a serious schism among the brethren. How many churches have a split because someone did not obey Christ's simple command to go to a brother privately and keep the matter secret? Such divisions often take years to heal. It is a great sin to bring dissention and strife into the body of Christ. Elders have a solemn responsibility to ensure that Christ's instructions are followed. Those who disobey Christ and bring strife and bitterness into the church must be rebuked publicly before all. When church rulers know that Christ's command has been violated and yet do nothing, they are partly to blame for the chaos this brings to Zion. Church courts must insist that Matthew 18:15-17 be obeyed.

The Fourth reason is that sins are to be kept private and dealt with immediately in order not to bring reproach on the name of Jesus Christ. Christians are Christ's representatives to the world. They are to set an example before the heathen of the power of Christ to save and sanctify. When professing believers treat each other in a manner inconsistent with the Gospel, the world notices and mocks both Christ and His church. David's murder of Uriah and his adultery with his wife Bathsheba gave great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme (2 Sam. 12:14). Calvin says of this verse: "they had their mouths at the ready to curse God and His church. Now we see here that although God hates fornication and every other crime, He values His honour so much that when we expose His name to shame by unbelievers, that it is a much more dreadful sin than any other that we could commit—for unbelievers are just waiting for an opportunity to make fun of true religion, and spit out blasphemies against God, and so crude remarks are on the tip of their tongues, like torches ready to set their rage aflame. Therefore, when Christians do not follow Christ's command and act with contempt for their brothers and the church courts, they dishonour Christ by their gross hypocrisy.

**Self Assessment 3.4**

Why should we confront a brother?

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

When Jesus taught his disciples how to resolve their disputes with each other, he advised them that private discussion was an important step to take. Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. Effective discussion often holds the key to whether we settle our differences or remain in conflict.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we considered Jesus' teaching on conflict management by looking at the context of Matthew 18:15-16, particularly verse 15. We also looked at how to approach a sinning brother and why we privately reprove a brother

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- State the background of Matthew 18:15-16
- What kind of sin is Jesus talking about in Matthew 18:15
- Why should we reprove a brother privately
- Is confronting a brother not judging him? Discuss

**7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 52.

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## **UNIT 4 BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The goal of reconciliation

- 3.2 The meaning of Matthew 18: 16
- 3.3 The Implication of Matthew 18:17
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Why are you to go to your brother? As noted, you are there to convince your brother of his guilt. You are there to achieve a biblical reconciliation. The passage says: “If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” Which means that the erring brother has agreed with you, admitted his sin and that you are now reconciled with your brother. But what constitutes a biblical reconciliation?

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the goal of reconciliation
- Know the difference between I am sorry and I am guilty
- Know when to reprove an erring brother with other brethren
- Know why and when to approach the church for reconciliation with an erring brother

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 THE GOAL OF RECONCILIATION**

Whenever sin is involved it is simply not enough to say “I’m sorry” or “I apologize.” Jay Adams explains why: “An apology is an inadequate humanistic substitute for the real thing. Nowhere do the Scriptures require, or even encourage, apologizing. To say ‘I’m sorry’ is a human dodge for doing what God has commanded.” The biblical response is to say: “Yes, I am guilty. I have sinned against you. Will you forgive me?” The reason that an apology is inadequate when actual sin has occurred is because it does not elicit a proper biblical response. When a Christians admits his guilt and then says: “Will you forgive me? the Christian who has come to confront him regarding his sin must say: “Yes, I forgive you.” This places the ball in his court. He must either explicitly forgive or openly

rebel against God. When the brother says, “I forgive you,” he promises never to bring the matter up against you; never to bring the matter up again to others (even his wife); and never to bring the matter up to himself by dwelling on it and dredging up bitterness, etc. This, beloved is biblical reconciliation. Apologies are fine when sin is not involved (e.g., when you accidentally bump into someone at the shopping mall) but they should never be used as a substitute for biblical reconciliation.

In a number of passages, God is revealed as the one who brings peace. Come behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth: He breaks the bows and cuts the spear in two. He burns the chariot in the fire. Psalm 46, verses 8 and 9  
This and other scriptures proclaim how God is actively involved in the affairs of men, and there are at least eleven different examples in the Bible of God intervening to help men resolve their differences with each other.

### **Self Assessment 3.1**

What is the difference between an Apology and Biblical Reconciliation

## **3.2 THE MEANING OF MATTHEW 18: 16**

What if you go to your brother and make a real effort to convince him of his sin and he rejects your counsel? What is the next step? Verse 16: “But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses’ every word may be established.”

The Christian must not give up. Christ commands you to take one or two other Christians with you as witnesses and then reprove your brother again. The bringing of one or two other believers serves the following purposes.

### **3.2.1. Provides Witnesses**

The main reason is to provide witnesses. Christ quotes Deuteronomy 19:15: “In order that by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.” A man is not to be condemned solely on the account of one witness. It is important to note that these additional witnesses are not witnesses to the sin committed (for the text is discussing a sin committed to only one person) but are to be witnesses to the reconciliation process. They are there to certify that a sincere effort was made at reconciliation by the one wronged, and if need be, to serve as witnesses before the church if the wrong-doer refuses to admit guilt and to reconcile.

If the witnesses are there to witness the reconciliation process and have not actually witnessed the wrong-doing, then what is to be done if the one who is said

to have committed sin, explicitly denies the fact and declares that he is falsely and slanderously accused? If a person who professes Christ, is a blatant liar, or is living in obstinate and rebellious self-deception, Calvin argues that he should be left alone. The witnesses cannot ascertain objectively which party is lying and thus it is better to let the matter go rather than convict an innocent person. And how could I argue with a man who boldly denies the whole matter? For he who has the effrontery to deny the crime which he has committed shuts the door against a second admonition. However, there is the possibility that when confronted with two or three witnesses the denier may repent or give forth inconsistent testimony, etc. Also, it may be wise to bring witnesses in case the accused one (who is lying) brings up the issue with others in the future. Thus, at least there would be a public record of the charge and counter-charge. In any event such instances of blatant denial are thankfully quite rare.

### **3.2.2. INCREASES BROTHERLY PERSUASION**

Bringing along one to two witnesses serves many functions. One purpose is to increase brotherly persuasion against the accused. If the witnesses ascertain that a sin has been committed, they are to reason with the offender and encourage him to repent, confess and be reconciled with his brother. It may be easier for two or three persons to succeed in this task than for one. It is one thing for the offender to disagree with one, but when two others concur in the matter against him, it is unreasonable and arrogant not to submit and repent under such circumstances. Having mature believers as witnesses should impress the offender with the more serious nature of his situation. Furthermore, it should be clearly explained that in accordance with Christ's command the second step in the process of church discipline is in progress. Most Christians will not want the matter to become public and therefore should be more willing to receive admonitions.

### **3.2.3. INCREASES THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION**

The seriousness of this second step should also make the accuser reflect on the nature of his charges. "Is my case really so serious that I can get one or two other persons of sound judgment to go with me; or am I, perhaps, making a mountain out of a mole-hill?"<sup>19</sup> Was it really sin that occurred? Could I be mistaken? Was God's law actually violated or am I upset because my feelings were hurt? Was it just a misunderstanding or personality difference? Perhaps I should just drop the issue altogether, etc.? Sometimes witnesses are brought in and discover that the accuser's charges are frivolous. The great wisdom of this second step is that most cases that are frivolous, wrong, based on legalism and so forth, are dealt with before the church court (the session) has to get involved and before the issue becomes public. Once again not only are reputations preserved, but also the peace

of the church is preserved. The serious nature of this second step requires that the witnesses chosen are mature, objective, and knowledgeable in the Scriptures. A witness who does not know God's word and who is not objective is of little use.

### **3.2.4. PROVIDES EVIDENCE TO THE CHURCH COURT**

The witnesses not only increase the serious nature of the situation and increase persuasive power but also, if necessary, provide evidence against the accused before the church during the third step. These witnesses provide the session with reliable eyewitness testimony to the refusal to repent and reconcile. There is great wisdom in this three stage process. Not only is love, mercy and patience exhibited toward the offender by giving three distinct opportunities to repent and reconcile, but only serious cases reach the session level. And, when they do reach the session, abundant evidence should already be at hand. Thus the session's work load is kept reasonable and when cases do arrive, there is already a history and evidence to work with.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

Why is it important to take one or two brothers along in reconciling with an erring brother?

### **3.3 THE IMPLICATION OF MATTHEW 18:17**

If the second step is unsuccessful, then Christ says, tell it to the church. "If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church" (vs. 17). What does Christ mean when He says church? Christ means that the offender and the witnesses must appear before the elders of the local church. This was the practice of the Jewish synagogues when Christ spoke these words and it was the practice also of the Apostolic Church. Paul instructs Titus to "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (3:10-11). Christ has appointed some to be governors or rulers over congregations and over all particular persons within the local assembly. These men have the responsibility to address the complaints of the offended, and to remove scandals. They have the authority from Christ to call before them, to examine, and even discipline if necessary the offender. The 19th Century expert on church government Samuel Miller says: "There is only one passage more which will be adduced in support of the class of Elders before us. This is found in Matthew 18: 15-17. Here it is believed that the 17th verse, which enjoins—Tell it to the Church—has evidently a reference to the plan of discipline known to have been

pursued in the Jewish Synagogue; and that the meaning is, ‘Tell it to that Consistory or Judicatory,’ which is the Church acting by its representatives.... We must always interpret language agreeably to the well known understanding and habit of the time and the country in which it is delivered. Now, it is perfectly certain that the phrase—‘Tell it to the Church’—was constantly in use among the Jews to express the carrying of a complaint to the Eldership or representatives of the Church. And it is quite as certain that actual cases occur in the Old Testament in which the term Church (ekklesia) is applied to the body of Elders. See as an example of this Deuteronomy 31: 28-30

### **3.3.1 THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS TO NOTE REGARDING THIS THIRD STEP.**

First, Christ’s command clearly presupposed that all professing Christians are to be members of a local church and under the authority of the elders in that church. Church officers do not have the authority to summon anyone before the court except those under their care and authority. If someone is not a member of a church and not under authority, excommunication is meaningless. Why would anyone be concerned about being cast out of a church of which he is already not a part? The author of Hebrews also assumes that every believer is under the authority of particular church governors; Hebrews 13:17: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

Second, this third step involves more solemnity, persuasion and authority than the second step. The persons involved, the witnesses, and all the evidence are brought before the church court for examination. The elders of the church should be very knowledgeable in Scripture and theology. They should be gifted in wisdom and they should have a genuine concern for all involved. As church governors these men act (in the Lord) with the full authority of Jesus Christ. Thus to ignore the admonitions of the elders and the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the session shows a spirit of rebellion, arrogance and obstinacy. If the offender is found guilty by the church court and then disobeys the court’s instruction to repent and reconcile, then that person is guilty not only of the original offense, but is also guilty of refusing to submit to the decision of the court.

Third, given the fact that the elders are well trained in Scripture and theology and

have great wisdom and experience, this third stage should discover and remedy complaints that are frivolous and groundless. Although the second stage should filter out many cases that do not merit discipline, some groundless cases do make it to the session level. When the church court finds that a complaint is frivolous, then they have a responsibility to rebuke the complainant. If the complainant's charges are wrong and have been spread throughout the church, he must be rebuked by all.

Fourth, the third step which sets the case before the church court is the final step before excommunication. "If the offender disobey[s] the Church's direction for removing of the scandal, then the church may and should excommunicate the obstinate; that is, declare him to be deprived of the honour of a Christian, till he repent, and to be holden in such disrespect as the heathen and publicans were by the Jewish Church in those days." "Because of his own stubbornness he has lost his right to church membership, and it has now become the church's painful duty to make this declaration—in order that even this severe measure of exclusion may, with God's blessing, result in the man's conversion (I Cor. 5:5; II Thes. 3:14,15).

### **3.3.2 EXCOMMUNICATION SERVES THREE BASIC FUNCTIONS:**

It serves as a radical means to drive the unrepentant sinner to repentance. It serves as a means to purify the church, to sanctify it and preserve it from evil and heresy. It also serves as a public warning to others, to instill diligence to the means of grace and the fear of God. Two of these features are explicitly set forth by Paul in his instructions to the church at Corinth: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:4-7). The third is set forth in 1 Timothy 5:20: "Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear." Excommunication is thus to be conducted in the presence of the whole congregation.

After Christ describes the three-step process and finishes describing the excommunication of the person who refuses to heed the church, He then tells us the serious nature of church discipline that God will certainly back the decision of the session or the church court. "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on

earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:18-20).

Verses 18 through 20 are not a digression from Christ’s teaching on church discipline or the importance of group prayer but rather tell us that when elders act in matters of church discipline according to God’s word, it is ratified by Christ in heaven. Excommunication is not a light thing at all. In our day, people view church discipline as seriously as being asked to leave the Lion’s Club. But when the session acts, Christ is present. When the court asks, the Father responds. Christians should shudder at the thought of excommunication, for it is Christ Himself who excommunicates: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ...with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:4).” It is the elders who make the decision in accordance with Scripture. It is the elders who pronounce the sentence, but it is Jesus Christ who has the power and the authority to cast men into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### **Self Assessment 3.3**

What is the biblical position for an unrepentant erring brother?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The commands of Christ in Matthew 18:15ff are very simple yet exceedingly wise and practical. We hear much in our day about the unity of the body, and the love of the saints, but it seems that most modern churchmen ask us to do the very opposite of Christ’s words. They ask us to ignore false doctrine and to sweep sin under the rug. But such advice does not really lead to the purity and the peace of Christ’s church. Rather, it is leading the better Reformed churches down the broad path toward the incompetence, heresy and gimmickry of modern neo-evangelicalism.

The church should be a place of justice and biblical due-process. Christians need to learn to confront each other about their sins privately, rather than gossiping and tale bearing around the church. Church courts need to make sure that Christ’s words are strictly followed by church members and by the courts. Let us show the world our love for Christ by our love and concern for our brothers—even the little ones of the kingdom. “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a

liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:20-21).”

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we considered Biblical reconciliation by looking at the goal of reconciliation and the biblical steps in reproofing an erring brother.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- Explain the goal of reconciliation
- Why is it important to take one or two people to reconcile with an erring brother
- Does the church have the power to excommunicate? Discuss

## 7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption: A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), p. 219.

John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. xvi, p. 355.

Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church*, (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage, 1987 [1832]), pp. 65-66.

## UNIT 5: BIBLICAL TEACHING ON CONFLICT AVOIDANCE

### CONTENT

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 David’s Example of How to Avoid Conflict

- 3.2 Important Rules in Resolving Conflict with a Christian Brother
- 3.3 Common Reasons why Christians fail to Resolve Conflict
- 3.4 The Relationship between Anger and Conflict
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The more that I read the Bible, the more I understand that it makes available the wisdom and tools we need to properly manage conflict that comes our way. In my study of scriptures, I learned that there is insight to help us avoid getting into the kind of destructive conflict that can sidetrack us, and take us away from our mission. In this unit we will be considering the concept of conflict avoidance.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Emulate David's example of conflict avoidance
- Resolve a conflict with an erring Christian brother
- Avoid common excuses why some Christians refuse to resolve conflict
- Understand the relationship between anger and conflict

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 DAVID'S EXAMPLE OF HOW TO AVOID CONFLICT**

The story of how David dealt with his brother Eliab is one I like to share on conflict avoidance (see 1 Samuel chapter 17, verses 1 to 58 for the entire text). Israel was at war with their enemy the Philistines, and Eliab was one of Israel's soldiers. When David came to the soldier's camp and offered the fighting men some words of encouragement, his brother Eliab got angry with him, and attacked him with insulting words.

Now Eliab, David's oldest brother heard David speaking with the men in the battle field and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I

know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle. 1 Samuel chapter 17, verse 28

When people call us names or say insulting words to us like this, it usually makes us angry. It causes most of us to fight back or to defend ourselves. Instead of arguing back, David remained focused on the important task at hand, and chose to walk away.

And David said, what have I done now? Is there not a cause? Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing. 1 Samuel Chapter 17, verse 29-30

If David had allowed himself to be sidetracked at this point, he may have never gotten the opportunity to defeat Goliath and bring victory to Israel.

Fight or flight, aggression or avoidance – neither of these strategies provides an effective long-term technique for managing conflict. Because we have different temperaments, some of us are less confrontational than others. Still, a good leader must develop the skill of confronting others when necessary. King David provides a negative example for us in the way he mismanaged his conflict with his son Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1-15:37).

Absalom had heard that his half-brother Amnon had raped his sister Tamar, yet he had failed to confront Amnon. Instead, he deceitfully arranged for Amnon's murder two years later and fled after the deed had been done (2 Samuel 13).

King David had also failed to discipline Amnon (13:21-22), and now he was shirking his responsibility to settle his conflict with Absalom, even though his son longed to see him. David relented only after Joab entreated him to restore Absalom following three years of banishment. But even after allowing him back into the city, David refused to see Absalom for another two years until Absalom forced the issue and the meeting did take place. But it was too late; Absalom had become embittered against his father and conspired to take the kingdom away from him. Lynn Anderson says, "The opposite of love is not hatred; it is indifference. Whether he meant to or not, David was communicating the opposite of love for Absalom."

David's conflict avoidance strategy not only failed to work but eventually caused the conflict to escalate. Had he dealt promptly with the issues surrounding Amnon and Absalom, Amnon's murder and Absalom's conspiracy might have been averted.

How Gideon, the general over Israel's army, dealt with the men from Ephraim is a second good example of conflict avoidance. While Gideon's army was in the

middle of defeating the Midianites, the men of Ephraim approached with these angry words:

Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight the Midianites? And they reprimanded him sharply. Judges chapter 8, verse 1

These men were upset with Gideon's battle strategy and how he chose to use them in the warfare. Gideon was right to be upset with them because they were being insubordinate to his leadership. But, since they were in the middle of the battle, it was not the proper time to deal with this matter. Addressing the problem at this point probably would have led to an argument, which may have sidetracked him, or brought disunity in the ranks. These things could have also kept Gideon and his men from defeating the Midianites.

Instead of dealing with the problem head on, Gideon chose to temporarily sidestep this issue by trying to abate these men's anger. His plan worked.

So he said to them, what have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has delivered into your hand the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger towards him was subsided when he said that. Judges chapter 8, verses 2 and 3

He offered them a well-timed compliment for the good work they had done instead of correcting them. What Gideon did here falls in line with the wisdom of Proverbs 15, verse 1 which says; A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

Discuss the importance of avoidance to conflict management

## **3.2 IMPORTANT RULES IN RESOLVING CONFLICT WITH A CHRISTIAN BROTHER**

Let us now consider some important rules in resolving conflict with a Christian brother

### **1. POINT OUT MAJOR FAULTS AND FOREGO THE MINOR ONES**

Major faults which are causing us to do or say destructive things to each other should always be pointed out because they are the kind of things that need to be corrected. But, we are to overlook the minor faults we see in each other, instead of taking the time to meet about them and make a major case over them.

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and it is a glory to overlook a transgression. Proverbs chapter 19, verse 11

Colossians chapter 3, verse 12 and 13 confirms that these minor faults are things we are to put up with in each another.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humility of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing with one another, and forgiving one another.

If we make it appear that the minor faults are major wrongs when we bring them into the discussion, the person we are accusing will see this as knit picking, or making a mountain out of a molehill. More than likely, this will make him angry, and nothing productive will come out of the meeting.

## **2. TRY TO MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE FACTS RIGHT BEFORE YOU ACCUSE SOMEONE OF SOMETHING**

To do this, you need to have done as thorough an investigation of the facts as possible. You should have reliable and trustworthy evidence, instead of relying on information you have gotten through rumours or hearsay.

If you do not take these steps, you may end up embarrassing yourself by falsely accusing someone of wrong. This is what happened at Joshua chapter 22, verses 9 to 31, when some of the tribes of Israel relied on hearsay evidence and falsely accused some other tribes of a wrong they were not guilty of.

When we falsely accuse someone, it usually starts a quarrel between us and the person we accuse. In response to being wrongly accused, the person accused will commonly get angry with us, and lash back or attack us.

In cases where you suspect someone may have an evil motive toward you or is holding a grudge against you, you should approach them in a gentle, non-threatening way to find out what the truth is about their motives. King David used this approach when he was not sure if the men who approached him in the wilderness were friends or coming as enemies to betray him.

And there came of the children of Benjamin and Judah to the hold unto David. And David went out to meet them, and answered and said unto them, if ye be come peaceably unto me to help me, mine heart shall be knit unto you: but if ye be come to betray me to mine enemies, seeing there is no wrong in mine hands, the God of our fathers look thereon, and rebuke it. 1 Chronicles chapter 12, verses 16-17

By using the word “if”, David made it clear that he was not accusing them of anything wrong. He was not sure of their intentions and he wanted to find out the truth from them.

## **3. POINT OUT FAULTS MEEKLY AND HUMBLY**

Galatians chapter 6, verse 1 confirms this:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. If you do this gently, the person you are accusing may hear what you say and be willing to correct the problem. But if you make the accusation with harsh tones, put downs or name calling, the person may get angry with you, which commonly lead to more arguments. As Proverbs chapter 15, verse 1b indicates, "... but, grievous words stir up anger".

#### **4. IF YOU ARE ACCUSED, LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE CHARGES, AND THEN RESPOND**

James chapter 1, verse 19 confirms that we should listen carefully, and take our time before we answer charges: "Be swift to hear, slow to speak...". Proverbs chapter 15, verse 28 also confirms this wisdom: "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer; but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil".

If we answer before we hear and understand all the charges, we will not be giving a proper answer to what is being said. Proverbs chapter 18 verse 13 confirms this when it says, "He that answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him".

Once you have heard and understood the accusation, then you need to make a full response to the charges. If you feel that the person accusing you is misguided in his statements or charges, you will need to fully explain to him why you think he is mistaken. This may help bring an end to misunderstandings or any false charges or misrepresentations that were brought against you. .

If the claim that you have done wrong is correct, admit the truth, ask for forgiveness, and be willing to straighten out the wrong you have done. You are not to lie about this, or try to justify your wrong conduct.

#### **5. MAKE COUNTERCHARGES WHEN IT IS PROPER AN BENEFICIAL**

A counter charge occurs when the one who originally was accused turns the tables and makes claims against the one who accused him. Counter charges should never be made to try to evade responsibility for wrong that you have done. A counter charge can and should be made when you are bringing up the subject so that all the important issues in the conflict are put on the table to be resolved.

The timing of raising a counter charge is very important. If you make the counter charge directly on the heels of the charges made by the other person, it is likely that the other person will think that you are trying avoid

dealing with the issues he has raised. This may cause further discussions to be unfruitful.

For this reason, it is probably best to fully deal with the person's original charges first before you raise the counter charge.

This is exactly what Abraham did when Abimelech accused him of dealing falsely with him (Story at Genesis chapter 21, verses 22 to 26). In response to this charge, the first thing Abraham did was to immediately admit his wrong and agree to change his conduct in the future.

After Abraham fully dealt with the charge against him, he then raises the counter-charge against Abimelech. He accused Abimelech's men of taking wells from them that Abraham's servants had dug. As these men openly discussed these issues and admitted their wrongs to each other, they were able to fully deal with the things that separated them and make peace.

### **Self Assessment 3.2**

List and discuss the rules for resolving conflict among Christians

### **3.3 COMMON REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS FAIL TO RESOLVE CONFLICT**

1. **I do not have the time to go to my brother.** Although it is certainly preferable to go and speak to a brother face to face, there are circumstances that may arise that would justify the use of a telephone to speak to your brother. The fact that we have telephones in our modern culture effectively eliminates this as a reasonable excuse. If a Christian realizes that a brother has sinned against him just after leaving on a two-year business transfer to Tahiti, he can still pick up the phone and effectively communicate with his brother. Furthermore, if you believe the sin is so serious it must be confronted then you are biblically obligated to make time. If you are not willing to set aside the time necessary to go to your brother then you must forgive your brother and never bring it up again to yourself or anyone else. If you refuse to set aside the time to confront your brother, then you had better not set aside time to gossip and badmouth your brother to others.
2. **If I confront my brother about his sin, is this not judging my brother?** Doesn't the Bible say "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt 7:1)? This passage is often quoted out of context and used as an excuse for laxity in church discipline. But the Bible clearly teaches that Christians can and should form opinions of others ( 1 Cor. 5:12; 6:1-5; Gal. 1:8,9; Phil. 3:2; 1 Thess. 2:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:6,7; Ti. 3:2,10; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 10; 3 John 9, etc.). Jesus Himself in verse 6 refers to evil people as dogs and swine! The

same Jesus who said judge not, also said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). If one examines the context, Jesus is condemning the hypocritical, harsh, and unmerciful judgment meted out on people that was a common practice among the Pharisees. Hendrickson writes: “The Lord is here condemning the spirit of censoriousness, judging harshly, self-righteously, without mercy, without love, as also the parallel passage (Luke 6:36,37) clearly indicates. To be discriminating and critical is necessary; to be hypercritical is wrong. One should avoid saying what untrue (Ex. 23:1) is unnecessary (Prov. 11:13), and unkind (Prov. 18:8)... This inclination to discover and severely condemn the faults, real or imaginary, of others, while passing lightly over one’s own frequently even more lamentable violations of God’s holy law, was common among the Jews.... The habitual self-righteous fault finder must remember that he himself can expect to be condemned, and this not only by men, but also and especially by God, as Matthew 6:14- 15 has already indicated. Matthew 18:23-25. Jesus hates judgment according to a false standard of righteousness, hypocritical judgment and an unkind, unmerciful, judgmental spirit. The idea common in our day that people are to judge no one is absurd. If applied consistently, this would lead to chaos in society; for if no one can judge then family discipline, church discipline and civil courts would all cease, and all prisons would be emptied.

3. **Is not confronting my brother about his sin unloving?**

Unfortunately, many in the modern church have adopted a pagan false definition of love. Love is defined primarily in a feel-good, emotionally based manner. Love is seen as letting bygones be bygones, as sweeping sin and false doctrine under the rug. Love is viewed as the opposite of confrontation. The Bible, however, defines love primarily as the fulfilling of God’s law; as obedience toward Jesus Christ. “Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law” (Romans 13:10). “To love one’s neighbour means to keep the law in relation to him, doing him no ill, in word, thought, or deed. If a neighbour’s course of action leads to evil, or to problems, a word of warning is to be given as a means of preventing him. Since Jesus Christ commands us to go to our brother when he sins against us, then, if we do not go, we do not love our brother. The context is going after the one lost sheep; one goes after the lost sheep to save it and not to harm it. Is telling the person who has cancer which needs to be removed, that everything is fine the loving thing to do? Of course not! Love means confronting sin and heresy head on. (Sin, of course, is confronted in a humble, loving way). “In essence, it is desirous to obey God in order to please Him and to do whatever He says is best for others.

4. **I do not want to go to my brother because I hate conflict.** This is probably the most common reason why people do not go to their brother. Confronting a brother about his sin face to face is difficult for many believers. Sometimes when Christians do get the nerve to go to their brother in private, they clam up and become very uncomfortable. Often, there is a fear of offending a brother, or of losing a friend, or even making an enemy that stops us from taking biblical action. This hatred of conflict and fear of approaching a brother must be overcome for several reasons. First, (as already noted) Christ's words are a command. Therefore, disregarding what He says is not an option for Christians. Second, ignoring sin because one hates conflict does not eliminate conflict, it only postpones it. Sin and heresy will act as a cancer upon the body of Christ if not dealt with and removed. Dealing with sin immediately actually involves less conflict, for sin is dealt with before it spreads and causes more damage. Paul said, "Do you not know a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven..." (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Sin and heresy must be nipped in the bud before it leads to a spiritual crisis in the church. Third, obeying Christ's command to go to your brother eliminates the sinful tendency of people to gossip and damage a brother's reputation. It is very common for people who disobey Christ's command, to tell all their friends about the offense. Because of our sinful natures, we would rather gossip and damage our brother's reputation than confront him in private. Although people may fear confronting a brother, they often do not fear telling all their friends and thus offend Jesus Christ. Our love toward Jesus Christ and our erring brother must take precedence over our hatred of conflict.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Discuss the common excuses why Christians fail to resolve conflict among themselves.

### **3.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANGER AND CONFLICT**

Dealing with anger is important in resolving conflict because anger is often a major part of the problem. Whenever you deal with strife, the subject of anger will usually come up. In most quarrels, one, some or all the people in conflict are angry in some way.

The scriptures also confirm the connection of anger and conflict. In many of the disputes discussed in the Bible, anger is either mentioned or the manifestations of anger are exhibited by the people in conflict.

According to the scriptures, our destructive anger must be addressed because it is one of the main causes for us starting fights with each other.

An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression. Proverbs chapter 29, verse 22

Besides causing us to start quarrels, our angry responses to improper words spoken to us or actions done against us cause us to stir up or add fuel to the flames of conflict fires, instead of abating anger or quenching the fires of conflict.

Our intense or uncontrolled anger also keeps us from rationally discussing our differences with each other. This problem can cause us to remain in conflict when a solution for peace is available. When we yell at each other instead of calmly discussing our disagreements, we often make the conflict worse. Anger often needs to be dealt with in order to provide people in conflict a complete remedy for resolving their disagreements.

There are over five hundred references to anger in the Bible. Because these passages give a great deal of God's wisdom into understanding, managing and overcoming wrath in our lives, I believe that the Bible is the best primer that there is on the subject of anger.

The relationship between anger and conflict cover the following four problems areas outlined in the scriptures:

1. **THE REASON FOR ANGER:** You need to understand anger, and how to deal with the unjustified anger in you that causes conflict. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 26 reveals that anger can be justified, when it says: "Be angry and do not sin ..."  
 Matthew chapter 5, verse 22 reveals that some anger is unjustified.  
 But I say to you whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.  
 According to Strong's Concordance, the words "without a cause mean without a just cause. We study a number of different passages where the people in scriptures exhibited unjustified anger, to help the listening audience understand when their own anger is unjustified. During this study, we also point out some of problems at the root of our unjust anger (jealousy, pride, covetousness, selfishness, etc...) to help people deal with these problems as well.
2. **INTENSITY OF ANGER:** Daniel chapter 3, verse 13 is a passage which describes someone with intense anger: "Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury..." This kind of intense anger can cause people to do violence or destructive things to hurt others and end relationships.

Genesis chapter 49, verses 5 to 7 reveals what this kind of rage caused Simeon and Levi to do:

Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honour be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self will they hamstring an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath for it is cruel.

3. **LENGTH OF ANGER:** Ephesians chapter 4, verse 26 warns us about anger which lasts too long: "... do not let the sun go down on your wrath...". Anger which continues over time produces destructive behaviour. It also causes resentment and bitterness to grow in our hearts
4. **SPEED TO ANGER:** This area of study alerts people to the consequences their quick tempers cause to help them overcome this problem and become slower to anger. Proverbs chapter 14, verse 17 touches on the problem of being quick to anger: "A quick tempered man acts foolishly...". On the other hand, Proverbs chapter 15, verse 18 describes the benefits of being slow to anger: "A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention".

The main goal of giving these lessons is to help people identify and address problems with anger that they need to repent of and get spiritual help for if they have a chronic problem. As we deal with our improper anger, our relationships with people change. Through the transition, we become slower to anger. We start less conflict. Also, when we are confronted by angry people, we also respond more calmly and either resolve the problem or help abate the other person's anger. The result is that we become peacemakers instead of troublemakers

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Explain the impact of anger on conflict management

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The key to conflict management is prompt reconciliation by "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Effective conflict managers know how to balance truth (confrontation) and love (reconciliation). Effective leaders learn to be peacemakers by dealing directly with disagreements and seeking amicable resolutions. David shows us that putting off confrontation only strains relations and inevitably compounds the problem. Avoidance allows bitterness to simmer and alienation to solidify.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we considered the Biblical Teaching on conflict avoidance by looking at King David's example, important rules in resolving conflict among Christians, common reasons why Christians fail to resolve conflict and the relationship between Anger and conflict.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- Discuss the importance of avoidance to conflict resolution
- List and discuss seven(7) of the rules required for conflict resolution among Christians
- Discuss common excuses why Christians fail to resolve conflict among themselves
- Explain the effect of anger on conflict resolution

## 7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

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R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 285.

Jay E. Adams, *More Than Redemption*, 1973), p. 254.

### **Module 3: STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

Unit 1      Understanding Conflict in the Work Place

Unit 2      Parent-Child Relationship

Unit 3	Conflict with Young Children
Unit 4	The Pastor's Role in Managing Church Conflict
Unit 5	The Place of Conflict Resolution in the Church

## **UNIT 1 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE**

### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Understanding Conflict in the Work Place
  - 3.2 To Manage a Conflict within Yourself - "Core Process"
  - 3.3 To Manage a Conflict with Another - "Core Process"
  - 3.4 Key Managerial Actions / Structures to Minimize Conflicts
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Managing and resolving conflict requires emotional maturity, self-control, and empathy. It can be tricky, frustrating, and even frightening. Most managers know that people interacting in the workplace can often lead to conflict. This common office event will always arise, and managers must know how to identify and deal with conflict. Most people automatically associate conflict with a negative outcome and the avoid it. Conflict comes from different perspectives among different individuals. Clashing of ideas and perceptions form many different confrontations. These ideas stem from society norms, individual values or religious morals.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Make the best of conflict in the workplace
- Manage conflict within yourself
- Manage conflict between you and someone else
- Understand the manager's role in conflict management in the workplace

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT IN THE WORK PLACE**

Common conflict in the workplace can come from many different ways; Poor communication between managers and employees, or broken boundaries of social norms or groups. Poor communication happens when a worker or subordinate is unable to receive the message from supervisors and management. Confusion is a common factor with conflict. When employees are unable to understand the requirements from management, it sparks confusion. When management can clearly describe in a polite professional way, the requirements at hand, then the results will have a lower possibility of ending in some type of conflict. Employees seek for leadership traits in management. If these traits: integrity, charisma, credibility are lost then management has lost the pedestal to workers. Credibility and leadership are key roles in managing people.

People manage conflict in many different ways, such as through humour, avoiding colleagues or using one's position or authority to resolve the situation. When it comes to relationship conflicts, some people tend to use avoidance. For instance, there were three employees including myself in our sub-department. Two of them do not like each other; they often get into arguments regarding how to get the work done. There is no communication between the two, they totally avoid each other and when disagreement happens, they tend to withdraw themselves and pretend that conflict did not really happen. This is a loose-loose conflict situation because nobody really gets what they wanted, the underlying reason and cause for the conflict still remains and similar conflicts occurs over and over. This is like a mirror for me, telling me that sometimes using avoidance to resolve a conflict is not the best approach.

Management is able to reduce conflict at work by reiteration of position requirements, task descriptions, and also by being receptive to gripes or statements from subordinates. Listening from the top will make or break productivity from the bottom. Supervisors are the first line of defence to intentionally upgrade communication with all subordinates that they lead. This can be done with positive results by meeting with employees on a one on one basis, in a timely and professional way. Evaluations is usually done that time, however it is okay to provide personal feedback anytime management or employees see fit. Open forum is another communication process for managers to minimize conflict. Open forums provides a neutral, safe atmosphere where workers are able to speak freely. Open forums also develop new ideas and procedures for routines and tasks at hand.

Depending on certain management styles and leadership qualities, conflict can be minimized. It is up to managements experience with handling these conflicting situations. Smaller organizations can have lower conflicting incidences. This is because most workers handle their fair share and mind their manners. Smaller organizations seem to have a tighter knit workplace, whereas large corporations are not able to bond. Most conflicts are escalated up the chain and end up as a memo. Smaller companies with less people resolve most conflict on the spot, only because managing less people can be easier to communicate with.

With regular positive feedback, management can cut down on any misunderstandings in house. Managers are great business oriented members of any organization. It takes a leader to be able to handle conflict in a professional manner that ends in a positive, productive fashion. A leader is someone who people naturally follow through their own choice, whereas a manager must be obeyed. A manager may only have obtained his position of authority through time and loyalty given to the company, not as a result of his leadership qualities. Some managers may not have very good leadership skills whatsoever but a good leader will make a good manager. If conflict cannot be reduced by management then social norms kick in, and natural leaders are born. Natural leaders are the unofficial spokesperson within the group. After management passes bad information, the natural leader tends to keep members focused in an unofficial way.

Management usually consists of people who are experienced in their field. A manager knows how each layer of the system works and may also possess a good technical knowledge. A leader may not be experienced in their field and could be a new arrival to a company who has bold, fresh, and new ideas.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

How can Management reduce Conflict in the office?

### **3.2 TO MANAGE A CONFLICT WITHIN YOURSELF - "CORE PROCESS"**

When personal conflict leads to frustration and loss of efficiency, counseling may prove to be a helpful antidote. Although few organizations can afford the luxury of having professional counselors on the staff, given some training, managers may be able to perform this function. Nondirective counseling, or "listening with understanding", is little more than being a good listener—something every manager should be. Sometimes the simple process of being able to vent one's feelings—that is, to express them to a concerned and understanding listener, is enough to relieve frustration and make it possible for the frustrated individual to

advance to a problem-solving frame of mind, better able to cope with a personal difficulty that is affecting his work adversely. The nondirective approach is one effective way for managers to deal with frustrated subordinates and co-workers.

There are other more direct and more diagnostic ways that might be used in appropriate circumstances. The great strength of the nondirective approach lies in its simplicity (nondirective counseling is based on the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers). No one has ever been harmed by being listened to sympathetically and understandingly. On the contrary, this approach has helped many people to cope with problems that were interfering with their effectiveness on the job.

It is often in the trying that we find solace, not in getting the best solution. The following steps will help you in this regard.

1. Name the conflict, or identify the issue, including what you want that you are not getting. Consider:
  - a. writing your thoughts down to come to a conclusion.
  - b. talking to someone, including asking them to help you summarize the conflict in 5 sentences or less.
  
2. Get perspective by discussing the issue with your friend or by putting it down in writing. Consider:
  - a. How important is this issue?
  - b. Does the issue seem worse because you are tired, angry at something else, etc.?
  - c. What is your role in this issue?
  
3. Pick at least one thing you can do about the conflict.
  - a. Identify at least three courses of action.
  - b. For each course, write at least three pros and cons.
  - c. Select an action - if there is no clear course of action, pick the alternative that will not hurt, or be least hurtful, to yourself and others.
  - d. Briefly discuss that course of action with a friend.
  
4. Then do something.
  - a. Wait at least a day before you do anything about the conflict. This gives you a cooling off period.
  - b. Then take an action.
  - c. Have in your own mind, a date when you will act again if you see no clear improvement.

**Self Assessment 3.2**

Explain the process of managing conflict within one's self

**3.3 TO MANAGE A CONFLICT WITH ANOTHER - "CORE PROCESS"**

1. Know what you do not like about yourself, early on in your career. For we often do not like in others what we do not want to see in ourselves.
  - a. Write down 5 traits that really bug you when you see them in others.
  - b. Be aware that these traits are your "hot buttons".
2. Manage yourself. If you and/or the other person are getting heated up, then manage yourself to stay calm by
  - a. Speaking to the person as if the other person is not heated up - this can be very effective.
  - b. Avoid use of the word "you" - this avoids blaming.
  - c. Nod your head to assure them you heard them.
  - d. Maintain eye contact with them.
3. Move the discussion to a private area, if possible.
4. Give the other person time to vent.
  - a. Don't interrupt them or judge what they are saying.
5. Verify that you are accurately hearing each other. When they are done speaking:
  - a. Ask the other person to let you rephrase (uninterrupted) what you are hearing from them to ensure you are hearing them.
  - b. To understand them more, ask open-ended questions. Avoid "why" questions - those questions often make people feel defensive.
6. Repeat the above step, this time for them to verify that they are hearing you. When you present your position
  - a. Use "I", not "you".
  - b. Talk in terms of the present as much as possible.
  - c. Mention your feelings.
7. Acknowledge where you disagree and where you agree.

8. Work the issue, not the person. When they are convinced that you understand them:
  - a. Ask "What can we do to fix the problem?" They will likely begin to complain again. Then ask the same question. Focus on actions they can do, too.
9. If possible, identify at least one action that can be done by one or both of you.
  - a. Ask the other person if they will support the action.
  - b. If they will not, then ask for a "cooling off period".
10. Thank the person for working with you.
11. If the situation remains a conflict, then:
  - a. Conclude if the other person's behaviour conflicts with policies and procedures in the workplace and if so, present the issue to your supervisor.
  - b. Consider whether to agree to disagree.
  - c. Consider seeking a third party to mediate.

### **Self Assessment 3.3**

How can you manage conflict between two people

### **3.4 Key Managerial Actions / Structures to Minimize Conflicts**

1. Regularly review job descriptions. Get your employee's input to them. Write down and date job descriptions. Ensure:
  - a. Job roles do not conflict.
  - b. No tasks "fall in a crack".
2. Intentionally build relationships with all subordinates.
  - a. Meet at least once a month alone with them in office.
  - b. Ask about accomplishments, challenges and issues.
3. Get regular, written status reports and include:
  - a. Accomplishments.
  - b. Currents issues and needs from management.
  - c. Plans for the upcoming period.
4. Conduct basic training about:
  - a. Interpersonal communications.

- b. Conflict management.
  - c. Delegation.
5. Develop procedures for routine tasks and include the employees' input.
    - a. Have employees write procedures when possible and appropriate.
    - b. Get employees' review of the procedures.
    - c. Distribute the procedures.
    - d. Train employees about the procedures.
  6. Regularly hold management meetings, for example, every month, to communicate new initiatives and status of current programs.
  7. Consider an anonymous suggestion box in which employees can provide suggestions.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.4**

Explain the manager's role in managing workplace conflict

### **3.5 GENERAL RULES FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE OFFICE**

Conflict simply comes from differing viewpoints. Dealing with conflict as a manager takes special elements to manage. conquer the situations that may arise between you, other people, or the organization. Conflict management is a learned behaviour and turns into an art form. Here are some ground rules for 'fair fighting'

- **Make the Relationship your Priority.** Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.
- **Focus on the Present.** If you are holding on to old hurts and resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- **Pick your Battles.** Conflicts can be draining, so it is important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy. Maybe you do not want to surrender a parking space if you have been circling for 15 minutes. But if there are dozens of spots, arguing over a single space is not worth it.

- **Be Willing to Forgive.** Resolving conflict is impossible if you are unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.
- **Know When to Let Something Go.** If you cannot come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.
- **Remain Calm.** Try not to overreact to difficult situations. By remaining calm it will be more likely that others will consider your viewpoint.
- **Express Feelings in Words, not Actions.** Telling someone directly and honestly how you feel can be a very powerful form of communication. If you start to feel so angry or upset that you feel you may lose control, take a "time out" and do something to help yourself feel steadier.
- **Be specific About what is Bothering you.** Vague complaints are hard to work on.
- **Deal with only one issue at a time.** Do not introduce other topics until each is fully discussed. This avoids the "kitchen sink" effect where people throw in all their complaints while not allowing anything to be resolved.
- **No "hitting below the belt."** Attacking areas of personal sensitivity creates an atmosphere of distrust, anger, and vulnerability.
- **Avoid accusations.** Accusations will cause others to defend themselves. Instead, talk about how someone's actions made you feel
- **Don't generalize.** Avoid words like "never" or "always." Such generalizations are usually inaccurate and will heighten tensions.
- **Avoid "make believe."** Exaggerating or inventing a complaint - or your feelings about it - will prevent the real issues from surfacing. Stick with the facts and your honest feelings.
- **Don't stockpile.** Storing up lots of grievances and hurt feelings over time is counterproductive. It is almost impossible to deal with numerous old problems for which interpretations may differ. Try to deal with problems as they arise.

- **Avoid clamming up.** When one person becomes silent and stops responding to the other, frustration and anger can result. Positive results can only be attained with two-way communication.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.5**

List and explain the rules for fair fighting

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Conflict is part of life and is not such a bad thing. Conflict helps to identify problems or potential problems that must be corrected before mistakes happen. It is fair to say that conflict is necessary for the evolvment of organizational goals and needs. This benefits the workplace for the long run. Debating over issues can bring forth new and improved processes and ideas. Conflict can really help personnel and management learn to recognize and benefit from differences. It can be daunting to get through conflict because it is hard to put personal feelings aside and see things from a different perspective. If conflict does not materialize and management leads by example, conflict can rapidly escalate to violence. Everyone will lose and conflict will continue.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have dealt with the issue of conflict in the workplace by understanding the concept of conflict in the office, how to manage conflict within yourself and with someone else. Also we considered the key managerial actions and general rules to minimize conflicts.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss how management can reduce conflict in the workplace
- Discuss how personal conflict can be minimized or avoided
- State four rules for fair fighting

## **7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

The following strategies "How to manage yourself"(Free Management Library:  
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## **UNIT 2: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

### **CONTENT**

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Family Conflict
  - 3.2 Conflict Style
  - 3.3 Sibling Conflict
  - 3.4 Conflict in the extended family
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Work on family conflict has led to some important findings relevant to prevention and treatment. One is that the form of the conflict is as important as how much of it occurs. Some families have a lot of conflict but still function well. This is possible because conflicts are embedded in the context of other behaviours. One significant factor is whether or not the conflicts are resolved (Cummings and Davies 1994). High rates of conflict may not be damaging if most of the episodes are resolved. Another key factor is how much positive behaviour is exchanged when the family is not fighting. John Gottman (1995) has reported that if there are five positive behaviours for each negative behaviour, then relationships are still healthy. As a result of such findings, family conflict is not always considered to be a problematic pattern. However, if conflict occurs in forms that are physically or psychologically damaging, then intervention is necessary.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Distinguish family conflicts from other types of conflicts
- Understand the relationship between conflict style and family disputes
- Understand the Concept of sibling rivalry
- Appreciate conflict in the extended family

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### 3.1 Family Conflict

Three characteristics distinguish family conflict from other types: intensity, complexity, and the duration of relationships. First, relationships between family members are typically the closest, most emotionally intense of any in the human experience (Bowlby 1982). The bonds between adult partners, between parents and children, or between siblings involve the highest level of attachment, affection, and commitment. There is typically daily contact for many years that bonds individuals together. When serious problems emerge in these relationships, the intense positive emotional investment can be transformed into intense negative emotion. A betrayal of a relationship, such as an extramarital affair or child sexual abuse, can produce hate as intense as the love that existed prior to the betrayal. It is well known that a high percentage of murders are committed within family groups. Family conflicts are typically more intense than conflict in other groups. This intensity means that managing conflicts may be more difficult in families, and that their consequences can be more damaging.

The second distinguishing feature of family conflicts, complexity, is especially important for understanding their sometimes-baffling characteristics. Why do battered wives stay with their husbands? Why do most abused children want to stay with the abusive parent rather than be placed elsewhere? One answer is that positive emotional bonds outweigh the pain involved with the conflicts (Wallace 1996). These are examples of the most pertinent type of complexity in family relationships—ambivalence. The person is loved, but they do things that produce hate as well. The web of family relationships includes dimensions such as love, respect, friendship, hate, resentment, jealousy, rivalry, and disapproval. Several of these dimensions are typically present in any given family relationship. Frequent family conflict may not be a problem if there are even more frequent displays of bonding behaviours. The course of conflict often depends on which dimensions are active in a relationship. Recognizing the multiple dimensions of conflict is a prerequisite for helping families deal more effectively with their problems.

The third distinguishing feature of family conflict is the duration of the relationships, the duration of some conflicts, and the long-term effects of dysfunctional conflict patterns. Family relationships last a lifetime (White 2001). A person's parents and siblings will always be their parents and siblings. Thus serious conflicting relationships within families can continue for longer periods. Such extended exposure increases the risk of harm from the conflict. It is possible to escape such relationships through running away from home, divorce, or estrangement from family ties. But even after contact has been stopped, there are residual psychological effects from the conflict.

Family conflict often involves more than two individuals. A third family member can be drawn into dyadic conflict to take sides in disputes. Multiple members may join forces and work as a team to win or settle disagreements. Such coalitions may be short-lived or become a permanent part of family life. They are common and can be beneficial. For example, parents typically side with each other in disputes with their children. This helps parents maintain order and is especially useful in large families.

Coalitions add a complex dimension to dispute dynamics and strategy. Skill in forming alliances can be especially valuable to individuals with little power. As with other features of conflict, coalitions can be carried to extremes. Scapegoating, a recurrent, excessive alliance between parents against a child or children, is known to be damaging to development. Certain coalitions disrupt healthy family functioning. An on-going strong alliance between one parent and a child against the other parent can threaten the inter-parental relationship.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

Discuss the characteristics that differentiate family conflict from other types of conflict

## **3.2 CONFLICT STYLE**

Conflict style influences the kinds of disputes families have. It refers to specific tactics and behavioural routines individuals or families typically use when conflicts occur. Individuals have conflict styles of their own (Sternberg and Dobson 1987). These develop through repeated exposure to conflict situations in the family of origin. The combination of individual styles and the family system results in a family style of conflict. For example, one family member may dominate in all disputes and forcefully settle all conflicts. This is a power assertive style that is based on the power relations that are part of the family system. Another style involves endless bickering in which any kind of settlement or resolution is rare. Such an irrational style often creates a negative family climate that erodes positive family bonds. A family may avoid any kind of conflict at the first sign of trouble. Conflict may be seen as being too stressful or simply inappropriate among family members. Such an avoidant style often includes covert conflict in which secretive actions lead to negative consequences for opponents (Buehler et al. 1998). A constructive conflict style is an especially important type because it openly addresses the complaints of family members and moves toward rational changes that eliminate the problem. Several other conflict styles have been identified and research in this area continues. Furthermore, it should be noted that each family is

unique and thus will have unique elements in its conflict style. But most families tend to use one of the main styles identified above.

Family conflict styles are learned in childhood. Years of exposure to the same patterns indoctrinate the child with the family's conflict style (Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 1992). The parents or primary caregivers usually establish the style for the children. Years of participation in the conflict style allow the child to learn the intricacies of using the style to protect or extend their interests. Acquiring a conflict style defines the orientation one brings to any dispute situation. For example, a child in a family with a power assertive style will tend to see any disagreement as a zero-sum game. There must be one winner and one loser. One dominates, the other submits. One must strive to use whatever power one has to defeat the opponent, who is striving to defeat you. Learning a conflict style thus includes assumptions about how interpersonal relationships should be conducted. Conflict styles learned in the family are used by children as they interact with peers and others outside of the family context. This can create difficulties in developing relationships with peers. For example, a child who is an aggressive power-assertive bully in the family may have difficulties making friends with peers who reject that style of interaction.

The concept of conflict style has been useful because it clarifies the assessment of problematic interaction patterns in families. In addition it provides a framework for improving conflict management in families. Some family conflict styles tend to interfere with healthy functioning. Power assertive, irrational, and avoidant styles can be especially troublesome. Getting troubled families with such styles to use elements of the constructive conflict style can improve conflict management and problems related to it. Considerable success has been achieved with conflict management training as a component in individual, couple, and family therapy (Vuchinich 1999). However, conflict style is only one part of the family system. As a result, conflict patterns may be resistant to change unless other elements of the family system are also changed. It is important to acknowledge this fact during efforts to improve conflict management in troubled families.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

What do you understand by constructive conflict styles?

## **3.3 SIBLING CONFLICT**

Sibling rivalry has long been recognized as a key element in family conflict. The concept assumes that parents or primary caregivers have a limited amount of affection to give to their children (Neborsky1997). Children therefore tend to compete for the parental affection, which they want and need. Through that competition, siblings can develop ambivalence toward each other. Siblings have affection for each other, but also some enmity. If parents provide sufficient affection for both siblings, the rivalry dissipates. But if they do not, then the rivalry can be a primary feature of sibling and family relationships through adulthood. In such cases siblings strive to out-do each other to win the approval of a parent or caregiver. Often the siblings are not consciously aware that their striving is based on sibling rivalry. Harmless sibling rivalry is common in most families. But in some cases it fuels long-term destructive conflict between siblings.

The negative impact of excessive sibling rivalry can be seen from a developmental perspective (Brody et al. 1992). Rivalry can erode the positive interaction dynamics that usually occurs between young siblings. Siblings can help each other learn to walk, talk, share, and show support. Intense rivalry interrupts these processes. In addition, a conflict relationship with a sibling can be the template for relationships with peers outside the family. Troubled peer relations in childhood are known to be a precursor of negative outcomes later on.

The key to avoiding problems with sibling rivalry is providing all children in the family with adequate emotional support. Most parents try to treat their children equally. This is an important goal because recent research has shown that differential parental treatment of siblings is linked to adjustment problems (Feinberg and Hetherington 2001). Although equal treatment is a worthy goal, achieving it is an ongoing challenge. This is especially true when the differences in the sibling age are large. For example, it is difficult to determine what is equal parental treatment if one child is a teenager and another a preschooler. Stepfamilies and blended families further complicate equal treatment.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Discuss the concept of sibling rivalry

## **3.4 CONFLICT IN THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

Extended kin are those more than one generation distant in blood lines, and may include relations created through marriage, adoption, or other social mechanisms. Most frequently, bonds with extended kin are less strong than those with nuclear family members (parents, children, siblings). As a consequence, conflicts with extended kin are usually less intense than those with nuclear family members. But

when extended kin have religious, legal, economic, or ethical concerns about specific marital or parenting behaviours, the potential for more serious conflict is present. There is great variation in the organization of extended kinship relations across human cultures. There is little sustained research on conflict involving extended kin outside of the United States.

Grandparents can disagree with the way their grandchildren are parented (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986). This can be a result of generational changes in parenting practices or problematic relationships between parent and grandparent. In-laws often disagree on a variety of marital and parenting issues. This is normal given that a marriage is a merger between two different family systems. These conflicts can become severe if there are also ethnic, cultural, or religious differences involved.

U.S. society usually gives the biological parents the right to make major decisions about their children in terms of parenting style, cultural orientation, and religion. But a high rate of divorce complicates matters in many cases. For example, immediately after divorce, noncustodial parents and grandparents often disagree with the way the children are parented by the biological parent and stepparent. Grandparents may be denied visitation rights. Such circumstances create an ongoing potential for extended family conflict. But the geographical distance that is typical between extended family members, and the U.S. cultural emphasis on the priority of the nuclear family, mitigates most extended family conflicts.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.4**

What do you understand by extended family conflict?

### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Family conflicts are usually experienced as unpleasant events, unless some resolution occurs. There is often reluctance to talk about personal disputes. But some families can benefit from changing their conflict style. Such change requires open discussions and sustained effort. But it can improve family functioning. When conflict is severe, there may be deeper family issues involved besides conflict style and communication. In such cases, addressing conflict dynamics can be a beginning point in dealing with more complex family problems.

### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we considered the Parent- Child relationship by looking at family conflict, different conflict styles, sibling conflict and conflict in the extended family

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- What do you understand by family conflict
- Discuss the relationship between conflict style and family dispute
- Explain sibling conflict
- What do you understand by extended family conflict

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### **UNIT 3 CONFLICT WITH YOUNG CHILDREN**

## **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Understanding Parent-Child Conflict
  - 3.2 Conflict with Adolescents
  - 3.3 Conflict with Adult Children
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Much of the research on parent-child conflict has focused on conflicts between toddlers and their parents. Although conflict may be especially prevalent during the "terrible twos" phase, conflict with parents becomes a significant feature of family interactions beginning at eighteen months (Dunn and Munn 1985) and continuing over the life span. Importantly, both parents' and children's conflict behaviours evolve over time.

For example, before children reach the age of sixteen months, mothers are more likely to use distraction or simple labels such as "naughty" or "nice" during conflict episodes. As the child ages, mothers are more likely to reference social rules, use bargaining, and provide justifications to the child during conflict episodes (Dunn and Munn 1985). Learning from these experiences with their mothers, children begin to develop their own abilities to use reasoning and justifications as early as age three.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the dynamics of the parent-child conflict
- Explain the reason for the conflict between Adolescents and their parents
- Describe the uniqueness of the conflict between adult children and their parents

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 UNDERSTANDING PARENT-CHILD CONFLICT**

Most of the research on parent-child conflict focuses on interactions between mothers and children. The mother most frequently acts as the primary caregiver. As such, mothers participate much more in parent-child conflicts than do fathers (Vuchinich 1987). Specifically, children oppose mothers more often than they oppose fathers. This greater number of interactions for mothers may mean that mothers exert more influence over children's development of conflict management behaviours. Additionally, fathers achieve child compliance slightly more frequently than do mothers (Lytton 1979). Moreover, children rarely follow a father's simple "no" with a bold opposition, but they would boldly oppose a mother's "no."

Traditional perspectives on parent-child conflict have considered conflict as parental discipline and/or parental attempts at compliance-gaining with their children. Research focused on observing conflict interactions between mothers and their small children illustrates some keys to successful parental compliance gaining. First, when a parent's behaviour is synchronous (i.e., staying on topic) with what the child just stated (child's immediately preceding talk turn), children are more likely to comply with parental requests (Rocissano, Slade, and Lynch 1987). In addition, these same researchers argued that parental flexibility during interactions with toddlers leads to more child compliance. In general, parental positivity and flexibility before and during interactions has been consistently linked with child compliance.

Although much of the early parent-child conflict research focused on parental control and child noncompliance, more recent research has emphasized the bidirectionality of parent-child conflict (e.g., Eisenberg 1992; Patterson 1982). Bidirectionality means that just as parents' behaviours influence children, children's behaviours influence parents. For example, Gerald Patterson's theory of coercive control suggests that parents adapt their conflict management behaviours to children's coercive behaviours (e.g., hitting, yelling, and ignoring the parent) rather than the reverse. This bidirectional approach to parent-child conflict broadens the focus from just compliance-gaining to a wider variety of conflict topics.

For instance, conflict between parents and toddlers in the two- to four-year-old range largely reflects the child's attempt to gain social control. Consequently, disagreements about rights of possession are particularly salient for children in this age group (Hay and Ross 1982). Other common conflict issues involve caretaking, manners, destructive/hurtful actions, rules of the house, physical space, and independence.

Between the ages of four and seven, children become less concerned with possessions and the rightful use of objects, and more concerned with controlling the actions of others (Shantz 1987). For instance, five-year-olds can become quite distressed when the mother will not play in a preferred manner. Such struggles to gain the compliance of others are integral to the child's development of interpersonal competence. The child learns that cooperating with others is an important part of control and achieving one's own instrumental goals. Engaging in conflict facilitates children's acquisition of social perspective-taking skills (Selman 1980).

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

What do you understand by parent-child conflict?

## **3.2 CONFLICT WITH ADOLESCENTS**

By the time children reach adolescence, their communication with others has gained greater sophistication across contexts. In conflict situations, they no longer express unrestrained hostility as a small child does. In addition, they exhibit greater flexibility in conflicts with their parents. Nonetheless, adolescents still express more hostility and show more rigidity than do adults. Even with their increased maturity, adolescents are still developing their conflict management skills. For example, when observing interactions between mothers and teenagers, researchers have found that mothers more consistently respond to their child in a flexible and positive manner regardless of the child's comment (Fletcher et al. 1996). However, the researchers also found that, unlike the mothers, the teenagers tended to parallel the mothers' comments in terms of following a negative comment with a negative reply.

Given the broad range of what qualifies as a teenager, adolescence consists of multiple stages rather than one. Traditional perspectives hold that due to parallel hormonal and physiological changes during puberty, conflict behaviour first increases from the early stages of adolescence to the middle stages and then decreases again by late adolescence. However, other researchers have found that conflict simply decreases from early to late adolescence with no peak during middle adolescence. In attempting to resolve this controversy, researchers have found that conflict increases in hostile and coercive families but decreases in warm and supportive families (Rueter and Conger 1995).

Mothers and fathers take on different roles during conflict than they had with their younger children. In particular, adolescent boys begin to act more assertive and forceful with their mothers but not their fathers. Mothers complement their sons' behaviour by being less dominant, whereas fathers become more dominant

(Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn 1991). Even though both mothers' and children's behaviours change, mothers still experience more conflicts with their adolescent children than do fathers.

The topics of conflict evolve as the child matures. Whereas younger children are concerned with gaining social control, adolescents attempt to gain personal control. Adolescents and parents often disagree about the extent to which parental control and supervision over the adolescent are legitimate. Specifically, parents and adolescents have conflict about such routine, day-to-day issues as responsibility for chores, doing schoolwork, observing a curfew, and respecting the adolescent's right to privacy. Interestingly, the issues of parent-adolescent conflict persist across generations. Thus, today's "rebellious" adolescents mature into tomorrow's "controlling" parents (Montemayor 1983).

Although conflict between parents and teens may be inevitable, effective conflict management does not always occur. The potential costs of poorly managed parent-adolescent conflict are great. For example, adolescents may become "ungovernable," use drugs, and/or run away from home. Certain communication behaviours during conflict have been linked with such teenage misbehaviours (Alexander 1973). Specifically, the researcher found that when parents and adolescents do not reciprocate each other's supportive communication behaviours (e.g., showing empathy and equality) and do reciprocate each other's defensive behaviours (e.g., showing indifference and superiority) the child appears more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

Explain the conflict between adolescents and their parents

## **3.3 CONFLICT WITH ADULT CHILDREN**

Although conflicts between parents and children persist after the child becomes an adult, little research examines these relationships. The frequency of conflicts likely drops off significantly for most parents and their adult children. However, with some level of maintained contact and interdependence, conflicts likely remain a fundamental aspect of the parent-child relationship. For example, young adults have been found to experience psychological adjustment and identity problems when they perceive that their families have a great deal of conflict (Nelson et al. 1993). Just as personal development continues past adolescence, the impact of conflict with significant others on that development continues.

Karen Fingerman's (1996) research illustrates that conflicts with parents continue even as the child reaches middle age and the parent becomes elderly. Again, development appears to play an important role in understanding difficulties

between middle-aged daughters and their elderly mothers. Due to their different stages in life, the mothers and daughters hold differing opinions regarding the salience of the relationship. In addition, mothers and daughters tend to disagree regarding the mother's needs. These studies illustrate both that parent-child conflict endures and that the link between development and conflict persists.

The management of conflict between parents and children likely varies by culture (Ting-Toomey 1988). Unfortunately, researchers have not explored conflict management differences due to cultural norms in parent-child interactions. Moreover, such investigations of cultural differences appear problematic for two reasons. First, the concepts of individualism and collectivism may oversimplify cultural differences. Although a nation might be defined as collectivist or individualist, the individuals that make up that country likely vary widely in their behaviour (Kim and Leung 2000). For example, a family living in the highly individualistic United States may nevertheless value non-confrontation in conflict and may exhibit a strong tendency toward collectivist culture communication behaviours.

Secondly, virtually every investigation of conflict management differences due to culture has utilized various conflict style scales (Kim and Leung 2000). Obviously, survey methods do not work well with young children. Moreover, the conceptualization that underlies such scales appears problematic for effective comparisons across cultures. Specifically, Min-Sun Kim and Truman Leung (2000) argued that the dimensions (concern for self and concern for other) that underlie the various styles of conflict management do not have the same meaning in conflict situations across cultures. For example, U.S. society values assertiveness in conflict and perceives avoidance behaviours as showing a lack of concern for others. However, in Chinese society, avoidance of confrontation is perceived as showing high concern for others. Future research needs to resolve such methodological and conceptual issues to examine how culture likely plays an important role in the development of conflict management behaviours from early childhood.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

Discuss the conflict between parents and their adult Children

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Although conflict may be inevitable in families, the consequences of parent-child conflict tend to be positive rather than negative. For example, oppositions between

parents (usually mothers) and their small children are usually brief in duration and not emotionally charged. Although such conflicts can test the patience of both child and parent, they do not seriously affect the relationship between parent and child. In addition, while conflict interactions between parents and adolescents can be more intense and dramatic, only 5 to 10 percent of families with adolescents experience detrimental effects on parent-child relationships (Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn 1991).

Considerable research depicts the processes surrounding conflict between parents and their young children and conflict between parents and their adolescent children. However, more research is needed to understand the nature of conflict between parents and their adult children. In addition, the research into parent-child conflict has not sufficiently examined the influence of culture on conflict management. It seems likely that the topics of conflict between mothers and toddlers as well as between teenagers and their parents may be universal.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have considered conflict with young children by looking at understanding parent child conflict, conflict with Adolescents and Conflict with Adult Children

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss the concept of parent-child conflict
- Explain the conflict between Adolescents and their parents
- Why do parents still have conflicts with their Adult children

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#### **UNIT 4 THE PASTOR'S ROLE IN MANAGING CHURCH CONFLICT**

**CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Healing the soul of the Church
  - 3.2 Conflict Care is specialised Ministry
  - 3.3 Suggestions for Conflict Care
  - 3.4 When Conflict gets out of hands
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Pastor Carey dreaded the monthly church council meetings. The rest of his ministry was pure joy. People who were otherwise very nice people subtly changed in dramatic ways when they sat down in their council chairs.

As the second and third years groaned by, he got the very distinct sense that he could almost always count on one or two council members raising objections to most proposals—all proposals, in fact, except those made by three other council members.

Then one or two of the members, who usually voted enthusiastically for his proposals, began stopping by “to see how he was doing.” A few months later these “supportive” members began complaining about how slowly things were moving in council. Pastor Carey defensively said he was doing his best; it was just that there were some on the council that wanted to move more slowly.

That was all it took. Within another half year everything came unglued. Council meetings were unbearable. People stood around in small groups of two or three after church and talked in hushed, and sometimes anguished tones. Worship began to feel flat, and attendance slowly dwindled. At the annual meeting several persons refused to serve in their positions any longer, and a major topic of public conversation was “the need for a revival.” In this unit we will attempt to handle the issue of the Pastor’s role in managing conflict.

**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate Apostle Paul’s prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23
- Understand the pastor’s role in a troubled church
- Proffer solution for a troubled church
- State the various progressive phases of conflict in the church

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 HEALING THE SOUL OF THE CHURCH**

The Apostle Paul prayed a deeply sensitive prayer that relates eloquently to church conflict. “I pray God,” he said, “that your whole spirit, soul and body will be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Usually churches do quite well with the first third of that prayer. After all, churches are about the business of eternal salvation (salvation of the pneuma). Those churches which provide recreational programs, exercise classes, support groups, and care for the poor and needy also do fairly well with the last third of the prayer (care of the soma). But churches are stymied by the middle part of the prayer—the preservation of the soul, or psyche.

Without presuming too greatly on philology, we observe that Paul did pray for the psyche, or “inner senses” of the believer. That is what the social scientist is concerned with when he studies human behaviour, and it is what the psychologist describes when she discusses human differences. It is reasonable to suggest that to complete Paul’s prayer, the church must better learn how to bring everyone’s distinct feelings and sensitivities captive to the obedience of Christ.

The combination of the spiritual ideas latent in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 2 Corinthians 10:5 provides the paradigm for church conflict resolution which offers hope to churches facing the kind of stagnation Pastor Carey’s congregation faced. The conflict which is in view in the following discussion is conflict where the pastor is not party to the conflict. Where the pastor is party to the conflict, the following discussion is a propos to the pastor also in his relationship within the church. It is also a propos to conference leadership as they seek to help the church in resolving their internal struggle.

Churches are collages of people with different systems of internal wiring, to use a building contractor’s image, and we must recognize those differences if we want people to be whole and at peace with themselves, each other, and with God. That means, in part, that we must find ways to conduct our church activities in such

ways that differences are recognized, respected, and resourced, rather than being rejected or destroyed.

There are differences in personality structure, however, but they are not the only cause for misunderstanding and dysfunction in churches. Lack of communication skills between people and divergences in theological priorities are two others. A fourth is the presence of deeply-seated personality disorders—even among Christians.

### **Self Assessment 3.1**

Discuss 1 Thessalonians 5:23 in relation to conflict

## **3.2 CONFLICT CARE IS SPECIALIZED MINISTRY**

For pastors of troubled churches, ministry cannot be viewed as “business as usual.” One cannot relate to troubled people as fully rational beings, capable of making and keeping bona fide agreements. And troubled church systems cannot be led as if they were healthy systems. If they are so treated, they will only become less healthy, and the pastor or leader will ultimately be caught by painful surprise and sadly fail in his heavenly calling.

Pastors of churches under stress must think of themselves as specialists. They must care for people according to the special, “soulful” needs of their wounded psyche, and not merely conduct “church as usual.” There must be a certain type of good, strong, focused preaching, honest worship, sincere praying, and genuine comfort, but the counselling program and administrative style must change drastically.

Counselling for disordered and under-developed types of people must take place within the context of a deep pastoral understanding of the type of underdevelopment manifested, and also within the context of appropriate biblical mandates. In such cases, the pastor must truly “speak for God,” without usurping his (or her) authority over the lives of people. If possible, people must be gently urged to grow in Christ, without commanding them so strongly that they regress instead.

The administrative leadership style of a pastor in a troubled church must be that of a loving but firm parent who presents clear outer boundaries to the children, while allowing them to develop slowly within the parameters of their own ability to grow. Disordered people can serve God, even if they cannot get along very well with each other or even with the pastor. But in such cases the pastor must be more than just a pastor; he must be skilled in the taming of hearts. It is true that only God

can ultimately tame the heart, but it is also true that God desires to use sensitive, skilled human agents in that effort.

Pastors, it seems to me, are generally trained to deal primarily with the first two of the five levels of conflict identified by Speed Leas (1985). At Level One, they can engage almost anyone with the statement, “We have a problem here. Let’s find a solution to it.” At Level Two, they can usually say to another, “This makes me (or someone else) uncomfortable. Let’s make a change, so there is less discomfort here.” But beyond that, when people say, “You have got to change, because I would not,” the pastor’s ministry can very quickly become undermined unless he can move from being a generalist to being a specialist, or is able to secure some sort of knowledgeable, specialized, outside help.

### **Self Assessment 3.2**

What should be the pastor’s attitude in a troubled church?

### **3.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR CONFLICT CARE**

Pastors, who are able to move from general ministry to specialization in conflict care, must begin by teaching their people a new way of behaving and communicating.

It is of the first order of importance that church people in conflict learn to listen to each other more objectively. A pastor can help his members learn to listen objectively by first modelling good listening in his conversations with them, and then by helping them learn how to do it with others. In practicing and teaching good listening, the following techniques are helpful:

- Reduce fear in the other person by legitimizing their right to be heard, and by receiving what they say as validly being their view of things.
- Practice the art of active listening, by affirming the statements and feelings of the speaker as being their own, and by giving them permission to be vulnerable in the presence of another without being victimized for it.
- Attend to the thoughts and feelings being spoken, so that the speaker gains a sense of being heard. Do not give the sense of taking sides with or against the speaker, but rather seek clarification both for yourself and for the speaker.

The second step in developing better communication and group behaviour is to help people learn how to clarify perceptions and avoid assumptions. The technique I find most useful is to practice and teach the Report-Repeat-Clarify trio of “shuttle communication.” It can be accomplished in several ways.

- In dealing with two people, the three steps can be presented, or outlined on a marker board or piece of paper, and the pair can be coached through one or two practice sessions of the technique.
- In dealing with a small group of people, the steps can, again, be presented by lecture and illustration. People can be paired off for practice sessions, using issues and questions prepared by the pastor-teacher.
- In dealing with a conflicted group, the pastor (or process leader) can watch for natural pauses in the conversation, and then ask R-R-C questions of the group. For example,

“Jim, could you say that over again, stating specifically what happened and who said what?”

“Ann, could you repeat for me exactly what Jim said, to make sure everyone understands it?”

“Sam, it seems to me in listening to you that you and Herschel have different perceptions of what happened. Can we separate (differentiate between) your views and Herschel’s, so we have a more complete picture of what occurred?”

“Jayne, it seems to me that your view of what happened is based on the assumption that . . . Is that correct?”

“Frank, my understanding of what you said is that you want . . . to occur, for the following reasons, and Shane’s opposition comes because of . . . Can you suggest one or two ways that both your goals and his can be met without disappointing either of you?”

A third step to be followed in developing better group behaviour is to teach people how better to relate to each other. Biblical statements such as Philippians 2:4, Ephesians 4:26 and 5:21, and Colossians 3:9 and 15 must be presented as absolute rules of Christian behaviour, and then explicated carefully and specifically with illustrations and examples. In the last several years I have had countless opportunities to follow this counsel in very dramatic and specific ways, and it works. People really do appreciate that kind of specific help. Ways of implementation include:

- Teaching people how to let an initial wave of emotion pass without imputing grave sin to the occasion.
- Helping people understand that feelings are not bad; only bad behaviour is bad. Sin is not in the initial thought; it is in the extension of the thought to malicious words and deeds. (I believe that Jesus' internalization of sin had to do with "dwelling" on the thought, not having the initial thought.)
- Encouraging people to say something good about another person or event before saying what they don't like about it. Show that the Apostle Paul generally followed that rule, and then extended it by making critical statements only in constructive and positive ways.
- Showing people that in the biblical narrative, collaboration was many times more useful than confrontation in resolving differences (Thomas, 1988). This, however, requires that one follow up with teaching on how collaboration works.

A fourth step in developing healthier behaviour in church groups is the process of empowering weaker members of the group to act and to speak forth. Empowerment may be either an event or a process, but it must be directed toward the individual who does not feel strong enough to participate in the decision-making process.

Some times empowerment is an event. During a conversation, board or committee meeting, or even a group or congregational meeting, the pastor or group leader may expedite the inclusion of a shy person in the discussion. This may occur either by calling her name, motioning towards him during a pause in the conversation, or asking for "additional comments from those of you who have not spoken yet."

At other times empowerment may take the form of a process, as the pastor or committed lay leader works with an individual in personal discipleship and sometimes in counselling. The goal should be the development of personal resources together with courage to begin to participate in group process where they have for too long been silent.

Empowerment lies in teaching individuals and the whole group the dynamics of group interaction. The "systems approach" to group dynamics (as well as family functionality) can offer much to the church. Being aware of how people react to words and events, and how the pecking order affects the flow of power in the church are only two examples of the insights which may be provided by systems

theory and analysis. Understanding the emotional climate of a group and the impact of different leadership styles upon different people are two others.

Beyond the need to teach persons in conflict better ways of communicating and relating to one another, pastors may also teach people in troubled congregations how to be permission-givers. Many texts of the Bible call believers to maintain the traditional values and teachings “once and for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Acts 15, however, is the record of a struggle to deal with discontinuity in the midst of continuity. It was an earnest and intense effort to sort out that which was changing from that which should not change. 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14-15 show that the process was not accomplished as easily and with the amount of finality which the church had desired in Acts 15.

Growth in grace and in knowledge does not occur quickly for everyone. Therefore, pastors in troubled churches must model permission-giving, and then teach others to adopt that element of the mind of Christ also. The payoff comes in observing growth and maturity in those who are brought along by Christ who otherwise would not have shown any development (see Phil. 3:15).

Six principles of Christian permission-giving, which allows people to develop at their own rate of internal agility, may be summarized as follows:

- Give life permission to be the way it is, until Christ changes it.
- Be who you are—responsibly.
- Let others be who they are—caringly.
- Be willing to say “where” you are—kindly.
- Let others say “where” they are—acceptingly.
- Care about your sister or brother—appropriately.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

List and discuss the four steps in developing better communication and behaviours in church groups

## **3.4 WHEN CONFLICT GETS OUT OF HAND**

Once the conflict reaches Stage Three, where some person or group of persons demand satisfaction as a price for their contentment, the pastor who is committed to church ministry rather than conflict therapy is better advised quickly to seek outside help than to try to address the issues himself. Not doing so only saps the energy for ministry and postpones the day of departure from that field.

It is true that some church lay leadership groups are not quick to seek out the right kind of help, and it is also true that the right kind of help is not always easily found.

The right way to convince reluctant leadership groups to seek outside help is to image for them what Level Three and successively intense and escalating conflicts will do to the church group. Beyond that, the busy pastor, active in general ministry should refuse to engage in their own private conflict interventions.

The right kind of outside help is help provided by professionals who are not emotionally connected to the outcome of the conflict. Such help could range anywhere from a (local) pastoral colleague to Christian Legal Society interventionists to one of several nationally known church conflict specialists. In any case, however, there must be equal commitment to truth, soul care, objectivity, and fair play. Both the pastor and the polarized groups in the church should equally submit themselves to care, so that the whole work of God might move forward again.

Some people do not want to change. Some people do not know how to change. Other people can not deal with change. In any case they must be helped to change according to their own readiness and willingness, and in keeping with their own personality profile and stage of development in life (McDowell, Fowler). If they are not ready, the church must wait until they are, and they in turn must allow the church to move forward as God leads the church. In such cases persons may be reassigned to places of service where they can be more fully utilized and fulfilled, without butting their heads against the walls of change to their spiritual destruction.

This kind of renegotiation requires strong—and sensitive—pastors. They must be sure that the wagon can bear the freight of such reassignment, and that diffusing potentially explosive situations can happen gradually enough so that more is not lost than gained.

Diffusing conflict in a rigid church system is really not much different than doing so in a dysfunctional family system, except that it takes longer and is far more complex. In recent years this author has successfully diffused several destructive family systems, with the result that the children's behaviour and school

performance have both improved. The same can be done in a church system, with the result that the performance of the church greatly increases. But it takes longer, calls for more concentrated conflict management skills, and far more energy than is demanded in circumstances involving smaller groups of people.

In a troubled church, one must take the initial stance that no one is wrong and no one is right. Rather, each individual possesses a sliver of truth, which is often mistaken for the whole truth. The task of the pastor (and the interventionist) in a troubled church is to help each person own each other's truth, so that eventually they may all claim the whole truth. Sometimes conflict spreads to the point of consuming the energies of the whole church. Conflict specialists have identified recognizable phases of the progression of conflict in an organization or a church.

### **Phase One: Sparks**

- People have minor disagreements over their goals, needs, perspectives, value, methods, or interests.
- People can still be led to work through their disagreements by acceptance, approval, or appreciation.
- People express disagreements through minor power plays.

#### Interventions

- Never allow the growth of the church to shift emphasis away from the value of the individual. When 10 to 15 percent feel "used" for the cause, the organization will move to phase two.
- Hold leadership retreats for spiritual and relational development.
- Promptly respond to complaints. Things seldom correct themselves.
- Review the church master plan annually with the church to keep ownership high.

### **Phase Two: Sparks Igniting the Storm**

- People become uneasy with each other because of perceived unfairness.
- Diversity is despised and not affirmed.
- Discussions reinforce their positions.
- The groups discuss strategy to handle future meetings.
- Opposition is depersonalized by characterization.
- Concern for personal image heightens.

#### Interventions

- Reject a wait-and-see attitude.
- Acknowledge there's a problem and call for prayer and fasting.
- Hold spiritual life meetings with a neutral visiting speaker.

- Exercise church discipline when appropriate.
- Involve neutral mediators to settle the disturbance.

### **Phase Three: Firestorm in Full Fury**

- Slander is the common form of communication.
- People become identified with strong positions.
- Leaders emerge on each side.
- Organizational structure is used as a weapon. The constitution and bylaws are used to leverage positions.
- Each side believes they understand the other's wrong motives.
- The pastor is usually in a no-win position and has a 50-50 chance of weathering the conflict.

#### Interventions

- Hire a crisis management consultant.
- Prayerfully determine if there's an evil core to the conflict, and start church discipline.
- Balance grace and justice.
- Consult a Christian attorney to make sure that issues are handled in a way that does not provoke a lawsuit.
- Be decisive.

### **Phase Four: Consuming Winds**

- The conflict has spread to 10 percent of the leadership and 20 percent of the body.
- Facts are hard to find. Arguments are emotion- based.
- Fighting is seen as the only option because neither side believes the other is capable of change.
- A subgroup's power is seen as more valuable than the entire organization.
- The reputation of the church is damaged in the community.
- Prayer and Scripture are used to justify personal ideologies.
- Revival and spiritual warfare are talked about in a quick fix manner.
- Board members improperly use church discipline.

#### Interventions

- Work closely with the consultant.
- Teach solid biblical truths on spiritual warfare.
- Do not allow Scripture to be used as a weapon.
- Minister to the faithful who are not involved in the controversy. Do not allow them to be neglected.
- Do not let the conflict become the pulpit theme.

- Call the congregation to prayer and fasting. Do not divulge sensitive information but get the church involved.
- Whether it is best to stay or leave. Sometimes parting is best for all parties.

#### **Phase Five: The Final Burn**

- Conflict may lead to litigation.
- The object now is to discredit and destroy. Winning is no longer enough.
- The church has moved from mediation to arbitration.
- An outside party officiates the dismantling of the organization.

##### Interventions

- Set up task forces to discover the complexities of each group's complaints. Make the complexity apparent to all in order to avoid simplistic thinking.
- Hire a neutral party to do a fact-finding procedure. When people feel heard, it bleeds out the emotional tension.
- Refocus the church's efforts on problem solving.
- Do not hesitate to eliminate non-functioning ministries or sell excess property. Preserve potential resources for future ministry.

#### **Phase Six: Rebuilding on Burnt Timber**

- One group may start a new church, while other people scatter to other churches.
- Some people (often the youth of the families involved) are lost to the faith due to bitterness.
- A faithful remnant will remain with the property and the ministry as it either dies or struggles with minimal effectiveness for years.
- Resentment lingers between those who departed and those who stayed.
- With proper leadership and time, the church can emerge.

##### Interventions

- If the pastor resigns, hire a trained interim pastor to prevent the cycle from repeating itself.
- Invite a speaker to speak to your remnant on themes of unconditional love, forgiveness, and unity.

#### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.4**

List and discuss the recognizable phases of progressive conflict in the church

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Whatever role one plays in encountering conflict in the church, it must be undertaken with a great degree of sanctified professionalism and human dignity. One must know what he is about, and where the resolution project is to go before he starts. Once one is in the midst of the whirlwind, there is no turning back.

In addition, one must be careful to become neither the victim nor the victimizer. It is easy for a pastor to continue to be “a nice caring shepherd” in the midst of conflict, only to be gobbled up by forces he is not prepared to encounter. It is also easy for a pastor—or interventionist—to hasten too quickly into the fray, thus becoming the victimizer of those who in reality seek healing, although they know not how to get it.

Moreover, it is fair to “call time out” occasionally, and it is paramount to develop good teamwork. Pastors encountering Level Two conflict can benefit greatly by developing around them a support group which can help them process the myriad frustrations and complex feelings with which they will be assaulted. Interventionists called in from the outside would profit to consult with former pastors, former lay leaders, district ministers, and others who can provide both insight and support. Above all, it is paramount that only one doctor leads the team. He may call for additional consultative support, but no one else unilaterally should do so.

Finally, everyone involved in dealing with conflict must learn the value of letting their feelings “cycle through” before taking them too seriously. It takes a new feeling from three to eight minutes to finish, and if new feelings of sadness, fear, or anger are not clearly identified and processed “in situ” they will only complicate the healing and developmental process.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have considered the Pastor’s role in managing church conflict by looking at the healing soul of the church and the fact that conflict care is a specialized ministry. We also looked at suggestions for conflict care and solutions to the situations when conflict gets out of hand.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Discuss 1 Thessalonians 5:23 in relation to conflict.
- What should be the pastor’s attitude in a troubled church
- List and discuss the four steps in developing healthier behaviours

- List the Christian principles for permission-giving
- Discuss the intervention required in each phase of progressive conflict in the church

## **7.0 REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)

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Source: "Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts" by Ron Susek (Baker Book House). P

## **UNIT 5: THE PLACE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE CHURCH**

### **CONTENT**

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Conflict is inevitable
  - 3.2 Christian Conflict resolution
  - 3.3 Conflict resolution for churches
  - 3.4 Resolving conflict in the church
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Peace-making between groups with irreconcilable religious and cultural differences involves conflict resolution. This is true whether the peace-making is between various brands of Baptists or between Muslims and Christians. When it comes to peace-making in the developing world there must first of all be the establishment of reasonable justice and the hope of prosperity. People are much more inclined to sit down at a negotiating table with those who they can see are treating them fairly, doing their fair share of correcting injustice and who seem to have a genuine interest in their welfare and prosperity. Conflict resolution skills are thus secondary to social justice and political and economic skills. However they are still vitally important. Clumsy conflict management can make things worse while highly skilled conflict management can make a pathway where none seems to exist.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the Christian approach to conflict
- Discuss several scriptural passages that support conflict resolution
- Suggest guidelines for conflict resolution in the church
- Describe the rules for fair fighting

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 THE CHRISTIANS APPROACH TO CONFLICT**

Here are twelve handy hints on how to manage conflicts in a Christian way.

1. **Go before God until you get His perspective on the conflict.** Do not act or speak out of rashness, anger or a sense of injustice. Moses had to learn this , his impetuous loss of temper in conflict situations cost him 40 years in the wilderness on one occasion and the loss of entry to the Promised Land on another. However when Moses did get God's perspective on situations he was able to intercede with power and resolve even the most difficult of situations such as national apostasy and idol worship, religious rebellion and "takeover bids".

2. **Remember God is bigger than the problem.** The God who created the heavens and the earth is able to deal with giants in the Promised Land, fortified cities and huge warriors called Goliath. Pray through the problem until you begin to walk by faith and not by sight. Keep praying until you begin to see the problem just like a small pebble in the hand of an Almighty God.

3. **Act in the "opposite spirit".** If a person is stingy be generous to them. If a person is insultingly aggressive - turn the other cheek. If they impose on you do even more for them than is asked of you. Return love for hatred and prayers for persecution. This actually does work and I have seen lives totally transformed by it. It transforms both lives too! Instead of returning evil for evil and causing the problem to escalate you must learn how to overcome evil with good. When combined with persistence in doing good this is a powerful life-transforming weapon against evil. It can produce deep harmony out of raging conflict. (Matthew 5:38-48 NKJV) "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. {Verse 40} "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. {Verse 41} "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. {Verse 42} "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. {Verse 43} "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {Verse 44} "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, {Verse 45} "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. {Verse 46} "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? {Verse 47} "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? {Verse 48} "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

(Romans 12:17-21 NKJV) Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. {Verse 18} If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live

peaceably with all men. {Verse 19} Beloved, do not avenge yourselves and do not give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. {Verse 20} Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." {Verse 21} Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**4. Read Proverbs until you know it backwards.** There is so much wise advice on problem solving and human nature in this one book of the Bible that it is amazing. For instance when I was called into help with an industrial dispute I prayed beforehand and the Scripture "(Proverbs 22:10 NIV) Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended." came to mind. That was just what that situation needed and fair but firm disciplinary action against the troublemaker brought peace to the workplace. Proverbs is an invaluable source of wisdom that has proven itself over time. Derek Kidner's commentary in the Tyndale series is excellent on this topic.

**5. Study how to say things.** How something is worded is vitally important. (Proverbs 25:11-13 NKJV) A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. {Verse 12} Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise rebuke to an obedient ear. {Verse 13} Like the cold of snow in time of harvest is a faithful messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the soul of his masters. Whatever you say should be clear, kind, true and appropriate. There is a right time and a right way to say things that is learned by practice and the study of people. Never lie, never muddle about, never forget you are speaking to a fellow human being with feelings and choose your time and place and manner with care. It can make all the difference in the world.

**6. Do not use emotional or forceful language or "legal sounding" words.** Phrases such as "cease and desist" just make you sound pompous and overbearing. Subjugate your desire to make your point to your desire to communicate in a clear and profitable way that will bring the results you want out of the negotiation. Never threaten legal action in a secular court against a fellow believer. (1 Corinthians 6:1-8 NKJV) Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? {Verse 2} Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? {Verse 3} Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? {Verse 4} If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? {Verse 5} I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? {Verse 6} But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! {Verse 7} Now therefore, it is already an utter

failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? {Verse 8} No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

**7. Do not be too harsh or absolute.** (Proverbs 15:1 NKJV) A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Do not go in like a dogmatic bull in a china shop. (Proverbs 12:18 NKJV) There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. (Proverbs 25:15 NKJV) By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone. Be gentle, reasonable, merciful pure, full of good fruits. (James 3:16-18 NIV) For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. {Verse 17} But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. {Verse 18} Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

**8. Act soon and keep it small.** (Proverbs 17:14 NKJV) The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts. For this to be the case you may have to undergo a cultural change whereby you cease stuffing your anger down inside you until you "blow up or blow over". Unless people are confronted with their wrong behaviors they most likely will not change. And we are more likely to learn from a gentle reminder than an all out blazing row which necessitates the use of all our defensive capabilities. If you are in a church or Christian organization then institute gentle and regular correction as a part of the "corporate culture" so that it becomes an easily accepted part of life. Do not involve others unless they need to be involved. This is the basic wisdom behind the three stage process in Matthew 18 and Jesus' exhortation on a number of occasions to "go to your brother in private, if he listens to you then you have won him". Once others are involved it is much harder to change your mind without losing face. Also facts tend to be altered a little to garner support.

**9. Avoid angry and easily disturbed people.** If possible keep them out of the process. (Proverbs 29:22 NKJV) An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.(Proverbs 15:18 NKJV) A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.

**10. Pay attention to the moral character of the people involved and only rely on humble people of integrity and faithfulness to help you in the peacemaking process.** (Proverbs 28:25 NKJV) He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper. Many who wish to become involved are unsuitable because they are gossips, or unreliable in some other way. (Proverbs 16:28-30 NKJV) A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. {Verse 29} A violent man entices his neighbor, and leads him in a way that is not good. {Verse 30} He winks his eye to devise perverse things; He purses

his lips and brings about evil. (Proverbs 11:12-13 NKJV) He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace. {Verse 13} A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

**11. Do not forget that in Christian circles many conflicts have the Accuser of the brethren as the primary cause.** In such cases "we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities in the heavenly realms." The mocker who needs to be "driven out" may be Satan himself. Thus we need to look beyond personalities to the spiritual forces which are taking advantage of their weaknesses and preconceptions just as Satan took advantage of Peter's concept of the messiah at Caesarea Philippi.(Matthew 16:21-23) When this happens good people can be used for bad purposes. Thus we need to be spiritually alert and keen to "maintain the bond of peace". Good teaching, prayer in the Spirit on all occasions and holy living will give us impenetrable armor against such schemes. (Eph 6:10-21)

**12. Be strong and courageous on the basis of God's word.** Before Joshua took on the military conquest of Palestine he was told. (Joshua 1:8-9 NKJV) "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. {Verse 9} "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Godly courage solves many giant sized problems.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.1**

List ten approaches of a Christian to conflict

## **3.2 SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Worship God and hold him in high esteem in your life rather than holding a me-first attitude, which leads to conflict. A Christian is to put God first in his life. "Do not worship any other gods besides me" (Exodus 20:3). Holding a "me-first" attitude can be a form of idolatry. When a Christian puts his own wishes and ways in the forefront, without regard for others, he is in disobedience to the Word of God.

If someone has wronged you, either at home or in a work situation, bring the matter to God. "Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires" (Psalm 37:3-4)

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of

everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:17-19, NIV) The world would be a better place to live in if people would live by these injunctions.

Another aspect to consider in Christian conflict resolution are the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:3: "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?" When a conflict arises, we are so quick to blame the other person without considering how we ourselves may have contributed to the problem. We are to examine our own attitudes and motives. Ask yourself, how have my ways or words contributed to the conflict? That is a hard thing to do, the admission of our own possible wrongdoing. It is much easier to blame the other person. But blaming the other person is not the Christian way.

Jesus also said, "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God" (Matthew 5:23). That indeed is a hard thing to do. Not if I hold resentment against my brother, but if he holds something against me, I am the one that is supposed to go and take the first step in reconciliation. You may say something like this, "I am sorry if I offended you unintentionally. Could you tell me about it?" I have had to do that on one occasion. The other person still may not respond favourably and may still be cold towards you, but in the eyes of God you have done what is required of you.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.2**

List and discuss four scriptural verses that support conflict resolution

## **3.3 CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR CHURCHES**

Every person has basic innate needs. The activity of one's life seeks to fulfil this set of needs. In order to fulfil these needs, a person works towards goals. Goals are states of being that do not now exist but that we can imagine existing. In other words, goals are targets toward which we direct our actions.

We are intentional, goal directed beings, seeking the fulfilment of our needs through the achievement of our goals, and we are beings who pursue our goals in social settings. Thus, we sometimes clash trying to occupy the same space at the same time.

Most of the great religions of the world promise a future pictured as a blissful, peaceful, conflict free state. The church perhaps embodies most vividly this human

desire to avoid conflict. As a result, most churches develop norms rejecting behaviour that encourages conflict and rewarding behaviours that tend to suppress it.

There are personal goals, personal goals for the organization, and the organization's goals. We always perceive the world from our point of view, and we act on the basis of it. Human pride, self glorification, and making personal perceptions absolute, ultimately corrupt. The deification or veneration of our own views builds the barriers, creates the separations, and deepens the estrangement from God and others.

A church can adopt the following list of guidelines and agree to follow them when differences arise or people voice concerns. Some of the guidelines are as follows:

1. Dealing openly with conflict can be healthy and useful for the church. It is okay for people to differ with one another.
2. Resolutions for the sake of quick agreement are often worse than agreements that are carefully worked out over time.
3. Fair conflict management includes
  - Dealing with one issue at a time.
  - If more than one issue is presented, agreeing on the order in which the issues will be addressed.
  - Exploring all the dimensions of the problem(s)
  - Exploring several alternative solutions to the problem(s)
4. If any party is uncomfortable with the forum in which the conflict is raised, it is legitimate to request and discuss what the most appropriate forum might be.
5. Inappropriate behaviour in conflict includes, but is not limited to
  - Name calling,
  - Mind reading (attributing evil motives to others),
  - Inducing guilt ("Look how you have made me feel"),
  - Rejecting, deprecating, or discrediting another person,
  - Using information from confidential sources or indicating that such information exists.
6. Fair conflict always allows people who are charged with poor performance or inappropriate behaviour
  - To know who their accusers are,

- To learn what their accusers' concerns are,
- To respond to those who accuse.

### **Self Assessment Exercise 3.3**

List the pointers for resolving church conflict

## **3.4 PRACTICAL WAYS OF RESOLVING CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH**

The church increasingly relies on the court system for conflict resolution in an ever-increasing litigious society. This tragic usage is a drain on the church's resources and, more importantly, a stumbling block for those who seek to know Christ as their life-changing force. Does the God of our salvation not have power to help believers resolve conflict? Why do we trust Him to save our eternal souls and yet believe that He is disinterested or incapable of providing an answer for the resolution of conflict?

Consider this simple answer: We do not want Him to help us resolve our conflict. In other words, we want Him as Lord of some things but not our conflict. Could it be that we, as a church, have abandoned the principles God provided for us in the everyday area that we call conflict? Here are some basic scriptural principles to help us victoriously manage conflict as we live out His Lordship.

### **1. Conflict is neither Good nor Evil, Yet Our Response May Be**

How we view and confront disputes is critical to our successful start of conflict resolution. Often we quickly demonize conflict and worry about our rights; thus we fail to see the eternal value created by the conflict. Since conflict is a natural part of the world system (Luke 17:1), why not practice viewing conflict as an opportunity to grow or to bless someone else in the process?

### **2. A Lawsuit Is Not Always God's Best Answer**

Paul admonished believers (1 Corinthians 6) to avoid filing lawsuits against fellow Christians. The beginning verses of this chapter spell out the conflict resolution options available to the Christian. Instead of taking a person to court, why not accept the wrong? Paul asked (verse 7). This suggests that accepting a committed wrong may be preferable to going to court. Verse 8 implies that those who wrong us defraud us. Could it also be that we, though wronged, may end up defrauding our brother by going to court?

### **3. The Church Needs and Has A Wise Man for the Resolution of Conflict**

Verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 6 asks a poignant question: Is there not a wise man in the church who can settle a dispute between fellow Christians'? In early America the

church was a place to resolve conflict. Today have you heard a believer who is in the middle of a conflict shout, “I will see you in church?” For that matter, when has the church offered itself to the community as a forum for dispute resolution? It is a sad commentary on the church that we provide a place to heal individuals of physical illnesses yet turn our backs on them when they ache for a conflict healing. What is the eternal value being created when we do this?

#### **4. Jesus Provides A Process For Reconciliation And Dispute Resolution**

Feeling he has been wronged, the believer usually ignores the first step: going privately to the individual with whom he has a conflict to discuss the matter, allowing the offending party to explain the rest of the story (Matthew 18:15–20). It is not necessary to share one’s position and emotions with others before attempting reconciliation. Only when this process fails are we to take one or two other believers with us as witnesses to the dispute. Why? To help both parties hear each other, find the truth, arrive at a just resolution of the dispute, and ultimately reconcile the relationship. If that attempt fails, the church should be ready to hear the conflict and to take appropriate action — frequently discipline in nature — to help the parties reconcile and resolve the conflict in a way that will not only help them grow spiritually but also help restore church purity. It is encouraging to know that Jesus promised to be in the midst of this whole process.

#### **5. We Cannot Ignore A Dispute That Someone Has With Us**

Matthew 5:23, 24 focuses attention on what to do when we know that someone has a conflict with us. In this instance, we are obligated to initiate the process to reconcile the relationship and address the conflict issues. We cannot ignore the conflict simply because we feel we have done nothing wrong. Scripture indicates that Jesus does not want us to even worship Him until we earnestly attempt reconciliation. This is not a novel idea. For example, even many African believers will not take communion if they know someone has a conflict with them.

### **3.4.1 Practical Steps in Resolving Conflicts among Christians**

#### **1. Pray about the Problem Together**

Do this humbly not as a way to bring judgment down on the other person! Commit to trying to find a solution, and then define the conflict as a mutual problem. In the majority of conflict situations, neither side is totally wrong or totally right. In most cases there are things to sort out on both sides. So try to perceive the situation as a mutual problem not a win / loose struggle.

#### **2. Clarify the Issues—Focus on the Needs and Goals**

Reframe the situation with the questions: What do we need to do to get out of this situation? What are our goals? What are the concerns? Do not be dragged back into recriminations or old gossip that is quite destructive.

### **3. Understand Each Other's Perspective.**

Treat the other person and their viewpoint with respect. Take the time to give each other time to state a viewpoint (active listening without interruption). Once we really understand the other person's viewpoint it is much easier to want to come to an agreement. Use specific communication—use “I” words instead of “you” words. (Instead of “You make me so mad when you do that!” I might say, “I feel so angry when something is said to me without considering my perception in the situation”)

### **4. Break the Conflict into Small Steps**

If the conflict is serious it may not be possible to sort all of the problems out at one time. Identify the options and develop the ones that give everyone more of what they want. Try to agree to deal with one issue at first, and then you can move on to the next.

### **5. Give and Take.**

Take a long-term view. Support what is legitimate and fair—resist greed and injustice. Give in areas that are high value to others and easy for you to give. Remember that you cannot expect to have everything go your way.

## **3.4.1 FOUR RULES FOR A "FAIR FIGHT"**

When it becomes obvious that there are major differences of opinion and the road to resolution is going to be a long and difficult one, remember these four rules for a "fair fight." I most often share these with married couples who have communication problems; however, they are certainly applicable to such intense situations as difficult church board and committee meetings.

1. Stick to the subject. Do not dig up last month's garbage.
2. Do not "fight" dirty. Do not say things that are primarily designed to express your anger and hurt the other person. This makes your job more difficult and produces memories that are hard to erase.

3. Learn how to negotiate. Make the department, program, congregation, and the body of Christ the real winners. Put their needs ahead of your need to win. This does not mean you go 50/50 all the time. Sometimes you will have to go 60/40, 80/20, or even 90/10. Of course, not every decision can be reached through compromise, but be willing to use it whenever and wherever it works.
4. Stay good humoured. Learn to see your disagreements in light of that little transitional phrase from the Gospels: "It came to pass." Remember, the vast majority of your differences will "come to pass."

By following these various guidelines, you teach people in your departments and on your board to express themselves in a way that allows for a variety of viewpoints without their being afraid they are offending God.

### **Self Assessment 3.4**

Discuss the rules for fair fighting

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Galatians 6 gives a principle that many would like to bypass when encountering a conflict: Conflict could be an opportunity for us to bear a fellow Christian's burden. How quick we are, however, to advise someone to file a lawsuit to protect one's rights. Examine what Christ would do. Would He sue, or would He seek to bear the burden of the offending believer? What eternal value is being created? The answer, of course, varies with each situation. Additional principles that address conflict situations can be gleaned from Scripture. Should we not purpose to do that? After all, God has equipped us, through the Holy Spirit, to search these timeless principles and to use them to reconcile relationships and resolve conflicts in a manner pleasing to Him. That is an eternal value well worth creating.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have dealt with the issue of conflict resolution in the church by looking at the Christian approach to conflict, scriptural support for conflict resolution, conflict resolution for churches and practical ways of resolving conflict in the church.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

- Explain the Christian approach to conflict resolution

- Discuss five scriptural passages that encourage conflict resolution
- Discuss the suggested guidelines for conflict resolution in the church
- Explain the rules of fair fighting

## 7.0 **REFERENCE/ FURTHER READING**

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV) or the New International Version (NIV)