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## How should conflict in the church be handled?

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**Question:** "How should conflict in the church be handled?"

**Answer:** There are many areas of a church where conflict can develop. However, most of them tend to fall under one of three categories: conflict due to blatant sin among believers, conflict with leadership, conflict between believers. Admittedly, many issues can cross over and actually involve two or more of these categories.

Believers who blatantly sin pose a conflict for the church as described in 1 Corinthians 5. The church that does not deal with sin among the members will open the door to more problems. The church is not called to be judgmental of unbelievers, but the church is expected to confront and restore believers who are unrepentant of sins such as those listed in 1 Corinthians 5:11: " . . . anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler." Such individuals are to not be accepted by the church until they are willing to repent. Matthew 18:15-17 provides a concise procedure for the confrontation and restoration of a believer. Confrontation should be done carefully, meekly, and with the goal of restoration (Galatians 6:1). Churches that lovingly discipline sinning individuals will curtail a great deal of conflict in the church.

At times believers might not be content with the direction or actions of church leaders. This was the case early in the history of the church (Acts 6:1-7). Complaints about the lack of care of a certain group in the church were taken up with the leaders. This was remedied, and the church grew (Acts 6:7). The early church used a conflict to improve the ministry. However, when churches do not have a clear process for dealing with such concerns, people tend to create their own platforms. Individuals may begin polling others in the church, get involved in gossip, or even develop a bloc of "concerned people." Leadership can help avoid this by

leading like selfless, loving shepherds that are examples of servants rather than ones that lord over others (1 Peter 5:1-3). Those who are frustrated should respect the leaders (Hebrews 13:7, 17), be slow to accuse them (1 Timothy 5:19), and speak the truth lovingly to them, not to others about them (Ephesians 4:15). On those occasions when it appears the leader is not responding to the concern, an individual should follow the pattern set down in Matthew 18:15-17 to ensure that there is no confusion as to where each stands.

The Bible warns that people in church may have difficulties with conflict. Some conflict is due to pride and selfishness (James 4:1-10). Some conflicts come about because of offenses that have not been forgiven (Matthew 18:15-35). God has told us to press toward peace (Romans 12:18; Colossians 3:12-15). It is the responsibility of each believer to seek to resolve a conflict. Some basic steps toward resolution include the following:

1. Develop the proper heart attitude - Meek (Galatians 6:1); Humble (James 4:10); Forgiving (Ephesians 4:31,32); Patient (James 1:19,20).

2. Evaluate your part in the conflict - Matthew 7:1-5 (removing the log from your own eye first is necessary before helping others).

3. Go to the individual (not to others) to voice your concern - Matthew 18:15. This is

best done in love ([Ephesians 4:15](#)) and not to just get something off your chest.

Accusing the person tends to encourage a defensiveness. Therefore, attack the problem rather than the person. This gives the person a better opportunity to clarify the situation or to seek forgiveness for the offense.

4. If the first attempt does not accomplish the needed results, continue with another person or persons that can help with mediation ([Matthew 18:16](#)). Remember that your goal is not to win an argument; it is to win your fellow believer to reconciliation. Therefore, choose people who can help you resolve the conflict.

Conflict is best handled when individuals prayerfully and humbly focus on loving others, with the intent of restoring relationships. Most issues of conflict should be manageable if the above biblical principles are followed. However, there are times when specific outside counsel may help. We recommend utilizing resources such as the PeaceMaker Ministries - [www.hispeace.org](http://www.hispeace.org).

**Recommended Resources:** [Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government](#) by Paul E. Engle & Steven B. Cowan and [Logos Bible Software](#).

