



## Church Fights—the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

*How some Skirmishes can Severely Hinder the Witnessing Effort*

By Kurt von Schleicher

Throughout all of church history the Body of Christ has been active and communicating in many different ways, but instead of always majoring on speaking in ways that foster harmony; it has all too often found itself tromping through the deep repugnant sludge of heated contention. And despite that angelic-like halo of spirituality that some people imagine seeing over the saints of God's church, the stones, arrows, darts and dust clouds of sharp verbal strife have often been equally visible. We so easily tend to glamorize and romanticize the churches of the New Testament and overlook the references to their problems and obvious blunders.

As we read Paul's epistle to the Philippian church that he established, we remember His dominant theme of, "joy." In the four short chapters of this letter, Paul refers to "joy" and "rejoicing." We also see very encouraging verses in this letter such as: *"My God shall supply all your needs"*, and *"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."*

However, this little "thank you note" also shows us two acknowledgments that everything isn't OK. There were problems, trials, interpersonal relational conflicts and difficulties between imperfect people. Two women leaders that Paul described as being his own colleagues, Euodia and Syntyche, were experiencing contention. This was an ecclesiastical cat-fight of sorts in the women's ministry and Paul addressed it quickly saying, *"I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the Gospel"* (Phil. 4:3).

The resolution of church conflict always begins with the conflicted people trying to work things out. Paul repeats the word "plead" (or "urge"), applying it to both female leaders. It's as if Paul is saying, *"I'm pleading with you ladies to come to an understanding so you can quit having a misunderstanding."* Just in case these two conflicting members of the church couldn't quit disagreeing, Paul commissions church leadership to try to help them out. The indication here is that not only is this issue the responsibility of the senior Pastor, the "true

Qualifications of a pastor: the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros. —Stuart Briscoe

yokefellow", but others should also be praying and working towards an amicable resolution. In this regard, Paul names Clement who was perhaps another leader in the church. In fact, he goes on to say that all the Christian workers should be working together to solve this predicament. Solutions are found with our heavenly Father. He hates fights among His children, because He knows how destructive they can be if left unattended. It's kind of like leaven. Unresolved conflicts between people in the church always end up affecting the entire church. I didn't say "conflicts" here. I said "unresolved conflicts" will always bring about much harm.

Man, I praise God for mature non-preferential leaders with wisdom like Paul that have the guts to properly get involved, rather than just ignore an issue that could develop and damage more people. And Jesus knew that such altercations would take place so He did some talking about offended parties: ***"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.***

***First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"*** (see Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-17).

To see that my adversary gives me my rights is natural; but...from our Lord's standpoint it does not matter if I am defrauded or not; what does matter is that I do not defraud. —Oswald Chambers

Yes, there is place for women holding positions of leadership in the church—notice Paul described them as being his own colleagues. Christians are fallen creatures, constantly in need of God's grace. The devil really is out to get leaders distracted and it's always sad and tragic when someone who becomes critical of spiritually healthy church leaders draws other people away from a healthy church. It's harmful! Some who leave that

church during a time of difficulty automatically find another church, but many do not. I've seen elders better than me so pained inside that never felt like returning to any fold. Some drop out permanently and the church is poorer for it. Unbelievers that visit or watch will often turn away in disillusionment when they hear of tensions, politics and infighting. We'd be kidding ourselves to think that sinners are not carefully scrutinizing those who claim to be born again. I challenge you to do your own thorough study on carnal fights in Scripture so that you can learn what to avoid, and become a better peace-making-witness for Christ.

Here are some reasons why problems in churches are not resolved: 1.) Those who have a complaint don't take it directly to the so called Christian they're upset with, and 2.) The people they do talk with make the mistake of listening to them ...they take on their offense. It hurts to see loved ones hurting. All of a sudden there are two people who are offended, 3.) Very cruel hypocritical carnal abuse can intentionally be instigated against fruit bearing innocent people (even from top leadership who might be jealous of their popularity). And sometimes these sins get swept under the rug by that leader (or by their family members who rationalize things for long-term family welfare), and those who were seriously injured can indeed set an appointment to talk it through, but the offender can claim to be innocent. He might just point his big finger at the lowly attendee saying, *"It was of God. You deserved it"* (when that offender has no real basis to back this up). That bullheaded closed-minded carnal leader is the one (on the human level) that these congregants trusted most and defend as their beloved pastor who was supposed to be mature. And as his sin starts to get found out, he flippantly wants them to get over it and brush it off, but they are in shock. The pastor wanted them ousted, but in a way where they themselves

would come through unscathed. Then the character assassination follows. It's a mess, but who is going to believe their bleeding-heart-story and deal with the abuser?

Blind guides, their hypocrisy would make any logical person want to jump ship and rescue their friends who are also in harms way or being harmed. The avalanche of humanity is hitting the backdoor and all is blamed on the devil and "those feeble-minded fall-aways." In actuality, the leader(s) are just reaping what they sowed. How sad.

Many conflicts don't involve leadership sins. We all must still resolve that we'll do everything in our power to resolve any church conflicts and to do so without any acrimony, animosity or rancor that can only bring more harm to the Gospel Cause. We must determine to abide by biblical instructions no matter what we feel like when handling fights or problems within the church. We must continue to forgive and earnestly seek the Fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace and Gentleness—bathing everything in prayer. What God wants for His church is peace! It is not a peace which comes from avoiding or denying that there are problems in the church. It is a supernatural peace, "*the peace of God*", that comes to those who appropriately respond in faith.

James asks, "***What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you?***" (Jam. 4:1). We, in the affluent Western world can be so egotistical and spoiled at times, because we are so used to getting what we want when we want it, but in God's Kingdom we are to learn self denial, candid sincere prayer and patience. Patience is another word for longsuffering, which means suffering long. Duh! The Lord promised to meet all our needs if we would just wait on him and not run ahead to try and help Him out. You remember how God gave the patriarch Abraham a promise for a son, but he chose not to wait. He took Hagar as his wife's wanted him to and now we have the long running Arab Israeli conflict today. Jesus said to all His followers, "***If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me***" (Lk. 9:23 nkjv). Patience can help ward off fights.

Get a friend to tell you your faults, or better still, welcome an enemy who will watch you keenly and sting you savagely. What a blessing such an irritating critic will be to a wise man, what an intolerable nuisance to a fool!  
—Charles Spurgeon

Paul commanded Timothy, "***Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights***" (2 Tim. 2:23 nlt). He told Titus, "***Do not get involved in foolish discussions about spiritual pedigrees<sup>1</sup> or in quarrels and fights about obedience to Jewish laws. These kinds of things are useless and a waste of time***" (Titus 3:9, nlt).

He who cannot obey,  
cannot command.  
—Benjamin Franklin

We are never permitted to fight in the flesh. Baby Christians around us will not understand that in God's family. The enemy roots and prods for this to happen, because he knows that it could become a stumbling block for a weak believer and also impede evangelism. What are some of the issues behind evil fights in churches? Some people are born with a propensity towards causing strife. They are hotheads. "***A hothead starts fights; a cool-tempered person tries to stop them***" (Proverbs 15:18 nlt). "***A quarrelsome person starts fights as easily as hot embers light charcoal or fire lights wood***" (Prov. 26:21 nlt). Unregenerate nominal Christians can be placed in a position of authority in the

church, because maybe a godly relative had a name there. Their heart isn't right and they have no ability to properly appraise spiritual things. It is natural for their heart to go after worldly things "to employ for God."

You remember Paul's strong dispute with his beloved coworker and friend Barnabas. ***"Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.' Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed"*** (Acts 15:36-40 nkjv). Notice that the Bible doesn't say that Paul started pulling rank by talking about his "breakthrough anointing" or apostleship to get his way. No, these guys weren't seeking their own, or for long-term family security. They both missed their brethren and felt concerned for their spiritual welfare. Paul didn't even threaten Barn or start slandering him by bringing up his name at the women's weekly prayer meeting in an inappropriate way. And Barnabas didn't rebuff Paul's idea with talk about his first-generation-seniority or try to leverage the whole thing his way with board meetings aimed at broad-brushing his friend as one who is slipping or becoming a heartless wolf. Neither of these guys started spreading the infectious contagion of gossip about each other anywhere, nor were they looking hard with a magnifying glass to try and find wrong-doing to twist maybe a quote into heretical false teaching, as a basis of hamstringing their brother's future success. The words "sharp disagreement" don't mean damaging or abusive, rather they tell us these guys weren't limp-wristed milk-toast kind of men. They were the real "men's kind of men" types. And in a desperately needy world gone astray, God worked their dispute out for good that one missions party would turn into two.

If you're a Christian pastor, you're always in a crisis — either in the middle of one, coming out of one, or going into one. —Alan Redpath

You also remember the cliquishness and the clashes in the church of Corinth. Now that was a different story. Those weren't the struggles of selfishly ambitious paid professionals. Those babies just needed to grow up. Spiritual Paul told them, ***"...you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed"*** (1Cor. 3:4). If we Christians start deriving some kind of pride from "our own little group" or from our "spiritual status" in the Kingdom from the big boys—the high profile ministers—we have become small and pitiful people. That stuff only leads to church-fights.

You must live with people to know their problems, and live with God in order to solve them.  
—P.T. Forsyth

Such stories like these don't make it into the church records of our day or into the *Dallas Morning News* ...unless the leaven grows into a big scandal that brings reproach, and fodder for all the late night comedians. But every church does experience its disagreements and dissension at times. As long as the *"Born Agains"* really care about the people in their locale and congregation, there will be some who will disagree on how the church is to be properly operated,

governed, held accountable and how the church is to apply the Scriptures under Authority and delegated authority.

If all churches of every denomination were combined together, the next generation would probably also have their unique problems. They would more than likely produce a new variety of churches with different emphasis too. The Calvary Christians, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Lutherans, the Assemblies of God, the Episcopalians, the Methodists and some other churches would likely come up with new ways of doing things. They'd come up with new ecclesiastical names for their groups maybe and some would also put First, Second and Third on the sign before their names.

With the right spirit, a clumsy church structure will work.  
Without the right spirit, an ideal structure won't work.  
—Malcolm Cronk

Every local church in this new century will have their traditionalists and their innovators (and I don't mean liberals), their stiff conservatives and their flexible creative-types on board ...just like in past decades and past centuries. And methods really ought to change according to their own culture, place and the non-sinful preferences and tastes of the target audience ...as long as the Message remains Bible-loyal and the leaders remain loving. Of course there will be times where stress levels will climb, times where Bibles will be pounded down on the board room tables with zeal, and tensions will pulsate along with maybe that vein that starts budging out on the pastor's neck or on the side of his forehead.

There will be those who want to maintain the status quo for Jesus regarding the non-rudimentary teachings just like those first-generation-leaders in the movement carefully set as example-presidents. And there will be those who want to branch off (not away from all the counsels of the Word of God, but) into something new—a new style, a different application of old truth. I'm sure there will be new methods in fishing, feeding and worship leading that will be good. "How can we let them do this?—this is just wrong!" some will assert. Others will yearn for the sounds of traditional music from the piano, the organ, and that Jesus Movement acoustic guitar with the one way and flower stickers all over it. Those things evoke sweet memories. And another leader will put their foot down, demanding more modern forms of synthesized-metro-electronica. Some will enjoy a fixed order of service; and others will prefer a service that is more freestyle and unstructured retaining their through-the-Bible-teaching. It's all good, just as long as the leaders do their proper homework in study and prayer, just as long as the sheep aren't limited to pet-doctrine-teachings *ad infinitum, ad nauseam*. Some will still appreciate quiet dignity; solemn non-religious-reverence and others will want to respond with celebratory enthusiastic excitement. You know, with the handclapping, hand raising and shouts—nothing wrong with that if it doesn't interrupt the Word. The Bible teaches us to rejoice in the Lord always.

But can you sense a generation gap at your church—wide as the Grand Canyon? One leader voices, *"If my people ever decided to fish for souls and evangelize this city, some would press for mass tract distribution and door-to-door visitation like in the olden days, some would want to stay home and just send emails out to groups. The youth would want to text message the Gospel to their friends, and others would restart up Sunday school and Wednesday night service again. Some would want to really research the matter first by bringing in the church-growth experts*

...not from the charismainiac branch of the Body--no-no, but from the more evangelical side so that things don't get too loud and twilight-zone-like" said one leader.

Varying viewpoints, strategies and methodology will also come up stemming from the basic differences between a church's strong-minded or deferring elders ...whether they result from age difference, color difference, background differences, budgetary financial standing (corporately or the individual sheep-debt-load) and socioeconomic situations with the different families

Every time we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we mean that we believe there is a living God able and willing to enter human personality and change it.  
—J.B. Phillips

involved. The varying viewpoints could also be affecting by the different educational or non-educational backgrounds represented. The real surprise in the Body today is our unpreparedness to deal with the non-evil differences amongst us and how to biblically lead.

More troubling and sometimes disastrous are the differences stemming from ulterior motives and personality conflicts in a church. When a leader gets

away with doing wrong for a long time, they often start attempting more audacious things. Small spiritual compromises lead to a great compromise and a shipwreck spiritually. Some leaders, who like to dominate at home, also throw their weight around in the vestibule if you will. Others exploit fellow members for personal prestige, retirement security, praise of people, or for family vacation profit. Grievous to see are headlines which read, "Pregnant Bombshell Ex-secretary Runs Off With Prayer Apostle," "Local Pastor Sues Evangelist", or "Church Treasurer Indicted for Embezzlement." If the church won't police itself early, why should the news journalists?

I think churches would still find themselves at times flanked by religious controversy and opposition even if all hidden sins and arguments arising from personal interest were totally eliminated. Churches deal with life-and-death issues in a struggle of good against evil, saint against the enemy. Christian leaders who actually teach the Bible and lead unbelievers to Christ are a rarity today. They are a target of Satan that he wants stopped at all costs. They don't have to yield to their fleshly nature and be stopped. There are safeguards, personal limits, boundaries and policies each Christian and leader can erect before it is too late. The Church filled with praying, witnessing "*Born Agains*" is a dangerous entity against the kingdom of darkness and all forms of evil. It is no anemic country club that's snobby, insipid and sedate!

## Personal Experience

My wife and I have seen a couple church fights in the last couple years ...mainly from the position of observers in two congregations. They were not pretty at all. We felt led to hold our mouths as much as possible. We didn't involve us and we chose to "keep our dog out of that fight" so to speak ...that is, until people start getting hurt. When there are injuries, you've got to get involved to try to reason things out. Actually, we have been privileged to work with seven local churches as underling pastors. Five of them were healthy and two of these churches were unfortunately not. All of them had some wonderful Christian people in them who really wanted to serve the Lord right, but the congregants in the healthy churches experienced far more harmony, love and growth in the Word that did the others.

We spent four wonderful years pasturing in Bavaria and then it was time for us to return to America. German nationals—friends of mine—were doing a wonderful job leading the main church in Augsburg, the American church planter named John had left a year before us and I had been invited to relocate back to Dallas to serve in an equipping missions organization with another long time friend named David for a season. I remember asking David upon our return for some advice on what church we should attend and he gladly volunteered some information about a mega church on the other side of town that he really liked. He said that it had great worship etc.

When the next Sunday came around, my wife Liney and I packed up our three little kids into the car and took off to go check this place out. We got there early, met some people then the service kicked off with a blast, with polish and with pizzazz. The worship time really was a wonderful experience! What a thrill to worship the Lord with 11,000 other exuberant Christians.

After some three months of visiting this church, the leadership approached me to extend an offer and see if I would be willing to join their pastoral team fulltime. I felt honored. We had checked out their statement of faith online which seemed somewhat brief, but in order. The senior pastor seemed to be down to earth; driving his conservative SUV to meetings (We hadn't seen his hundred acre ranch, greyhound sized windowless rock star bus or his high-end collection of exotic luxury cars and wine collection in his basement yet). We hadn't heard anything that was unorthodox from the pulpit while there and the other pastors seemed to really like us, so I accepted the offer, started in a couple weeks on a Monday, received a large salary, received a beautiful office and two departments to oversee along with doing all the church baptisms.

It was a lot of fun preaching and teaching the Word of God in that brand new massive sanctuary. It was great to take people out to do evangelistic outreaches too. They gave me a lot of freedom to witness on the streets at first. But after two years the lead pastors told me that they didn't even believe in reaching out to sinners on the streets or in Essential Christian doctrine. The church was doctrinally cultic because they were hiding all this from the bulk of the congregation. The leaders didn't want to lose any people or their tithes. What a relief to get out of there!

Right after that experience, my wife and I found a doctrinally sound church that was led by a pastor who didn't demand to own luxury items materially. And we were careful to make sure of this. They even asked me to join the pastoral staff fulltime to oversee their school. I loved doing chapel with the students and youth. I enjoyed building friendships with the families and teachers. It was great. But that fellowship turned out to be a church that was sociologically cultic instead of doctrinally cultic like the first one. Yes, it put out the right teachings from the pulpit and on the web. But what a challenge it turned out to be. In just a few short years I counted sixty two leaders (including teaching elders) who were mistreated and literally forced out of this church by spiritual abuse. To this day, it's an old church that is deeply in debt and is still very small and staying small. And there are reasons for all this, but many of the new leaders have no idea why it is this way. One of the elders while he was leading at this church told me something encouraging and helpful though. He said, "*We can all learn from even the worst lead pastors.*" It's true, we can and did learn what never to do and some things we ought to do. But at the same time that doesn't mean that God wants His children to stay in a sicko-church under self-focused heartless

leaders long. The Psalmist said, ***“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness”*** (Ps. 84:10).

I like what one of our excellent pastors (at a different sound church) years later told us. Chuck Swindoll said, ***“There is not a more powerful tool to manipulate people than the Bible. Never utilize it for this!”***

### **Here’s some things I learned from the Lord as I observed the leadership situation at one church:**

- 1. Don't be like heartless pastors who slander others or talk publicly about the failures of people who have departed from your church for a safer fold. Pray for them privately. Do what you can to show love and bless these people on the way out if they haven't left yet. Apologize and ask for forgiveness for where you or the church has wronged them. If you speak publicly of these people, speak graciously of them and the good that they did while they were there under your watch-care, (even in your staff meetings). Be grateful for what they contributed. Don't tell congregants that all your leaders have let you down and that their departure was a “blessed subtraction” even if you feel blessed that these people are elsewhere. (The real blessed subtraction for your church might be you ditching your carnality or simply resigning). Express gratitude to the Lord for the leaders, the janitors and the secretaries publicly (Not that we need to be like useless religious leaders wasting time by always applauding each other at church—a mutual admiration society. Never exaggerate about or embellish things in discussing their failures, especially when they have put in far more hours working at the church than you have.*
- 2. Never show anger or say unkind things to other leaders or towards congregants who are leaving you to attend church elsewhere. You know ...things like: “It no loss for this church if you leave! You missed a lot of meetings and never did much around here anyways.”*
- 3. Do not show favoritism towards your biological son, daughter, and relatives ...or even towards other workers (I mean by giving more money, perks and less office hours to certain free-wielding carnal teacher's-pets).*
- 4. Don't speak of alleged problem-people before the whole staff, always putting yourself in a Bible hero's shoes (i.e., David, Moses) as you explain the situation and the one you don't like in a Bible-numb-skull's role, calling them some name like Saul, Achan, Judas or using some other Bible fool's title.*
- 5. Choose to be authentically gracious and genuinely understanding. Don't pressure lay people constantly to do free labor at church that should be subbed out on the church's nickel. Don't take these people for granted, you don't deserve those who regularly do work on the church property. Man-up and pay for janitorial house cleaning, landscaping and mowing companies, instead of having a ministry of hinting and constraint where people feel like they can't ever get free from their bondage again. It's ok to ask for a commitment to a certain amount of time, but give people an easy out if they need one.*
- 6. Learn to receive criticism from other leaders, especially if it is about your odd work relationship with a close relative that you made that way. Listen, inquire, stick with the facts, have compassion and if there is wrong-doing, then reprimand the person in love or release them (there is always some truth in criticism. Have a mind to think that the report could be one hundred percent true, but do your homework to find the real facts. Live to change things for the good in His power.*
- 7. Hopeful wishes or not regarding your prayer target-person, don't quickly promote a novice or arrogant fool who isn't ready to lead and then cover for him every time he blows his stack or carnally goes off on God's innocent people. Don't make him your hit-man who is loyal to hit even if he doesn't know why you feel jealous of that popular godly leader.*

8. At church, if you can't say anything positive about someone in their absence ...you know, without the winking, don't say anything at all. Find something good, noble and true to say about them. David did this in speaking of Saul after Saul's ill fortunate death and Saul acted like a Bozo.

9. People will leave any church. All churches have an attrition rate, but if a whole lot of leaders are leaving the church regularly, there might just be a major blind-spot on your part (or maybe with a mean staff-relative, or a shortsighted high-ranking underling). Meet with those leaving and straightforwardly ask them why they are going. Don't just hand them a hate-letter ... I mean righteous-indignation-letter with verses in it and false facts about them. Ask them if there is anything they think should be improved upon at the church. Don't get angry or put them in some Scripture-passage-kind-of-box that they don't belong in. If an attendee loses respect for the senior pastor feeling that he has become self-important and self-obsessed, he should prayerfully go talk with the pastor at the right time. If the pastor proves to be closed, the game so to speak is up. That person will leave and no amount of misapplied or misquoted Bible verses will bring them back. They don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. Who would be stupid enough to stay in a church where the pastor is dense?

10. Don't try to form a family dynasty to take care of you when you age just because you opted-out of social security as a youth.

11. A Christian leader needs to be able to receive constructive criticism, especially from several of his handpicked leaders. Yes, there is normally a bit of truth in every critique of assessment. Don't have a hard-hearted: I-can-do-no-wrong-because-I-am-God's-anointed-one attitude. All Christians have God's anointing inside, even if they don't have the same rank in God's army.

12. God accepted me as I am, expecting me to submit to authority and to grow up in His Word. God has been both gentle and direct with me. He has never demand anything from me and that is how tender and non-pushy we are to be with God's people. Pastors, with all due respect... please see that they are not your sheep, to put to work as you feel and as long as you feel. A noxious-faith pastor will often expect too much of God's sheep and leaders and will harshly oppress them. Do you want them saying to their mate at home: "Man honey, the pastor never seems to be happy or content, because nothing is ever good enough that 'his leaders' are trying to do. He never seems to be satisfied inside as his family continually pressures new people to step up to the plate. If anyone says they will serve anywhere at church, the pastor locks them in for life. He is often angry with God's people for not giving more money or volunteerism to 'his church' so that it will grow to become the mega-church-cash-cow just like his younger peers in the minister already lead."

We all must recognize that not every church disagreement or conflict is necessarily evil or destructive, but those of the fleshly type are extremely injurious. I think many unbelievers who could have become Christians, turned to life of crime due to witnessing the fleshly type of conflicts. These things grieve God big time! Biblical counselors even tell us that though conflict is to be expected in any marriage relationship, a vigorous debate or dispute need not become a destructive-force that tears two married lovers apart. Am I an advocate of fair fighting then? Yes, if you were to call an emotional but courteous dispute a fight. Maybe I should say it this way: good arguments coupled with the right attitudes and right words will never violate clear cut biblical principles of unity, but such arguments can actually clarify important issues in a church, in a marriage, in a workplace ...to promote a better understanding of multiple good viewpoints? These arguments can be used of God as those people involved fuse in a good policy or decision for the welfare of all parties involved. Yes, all ecclesiastical conflicts are not unhealthy per se, but Christians must be cautious with the disagreements, that they don't jump to conclusions or become led by all their accompanying emotions or misunderstandings. All disagreements can

potentially become hurtful if carnal competitiveness, selfish ambition, misjudgment, name calling, ego, labeling of vilification, destructive bitterness and hurt feelings enter in.

If a church fight or dispute is properly handled through deferring peaceable wisdom from God and the communication contains no abusive speech, the apparent problem can really be a constructive force for uniting the body of Christ. I like how James said it, ***"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace"*** (Jam. 3:13-18). Out of church friction can arise new humility, new insight, new understanding and strength in the body of Christ if we are humble!

### **The Church is God's Family of Believers**

From nature's version of forest folklore, two spiny porcupines just out of the frigid snow storm had gathered together in a little rock enclave in northern Alaska. But that hole in the wall cave only seemed big enough for one, especially since they each had at least one long point to give. What could they do? They'd both freeze out in the straight-line winds and snow at thirty below. They determined to huddle real close and get warm from the sharp biting sting of winter. If they didn't use their heads and be logical, they'd soon become prickly popsicles as the violent winds blew. It all went well until their quills would swell. One would prick the other, time and time again, until one felt like moving far, far apart. "I don't need my new found friend, his stickers will not bend." There's just no way to possibly even start in this fellowship of need, because this guy won't give heed. Before long they were shivering again, but they wanted to blend, so both sidled close in the fellowship post and both renewed commitment to give the most. We want to live and will learn to forgive! New scene; same ending for us Christians.

We need each other's fellowship and encouragement in the church or we will wither and die out in the storms. God made us to be vertically dependant and horizontally interdependent in His warm-hearted Spirit. So let's try to stop needling each other and think right about the other! Paul said, ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled"*** (2 Cor. 10:3-6).

<b>Six Ways To Think Like Christ, Rather Than Like Some Fighter</b>			
<b>Reference</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>It's not enough to</b>	<b>We must also</b>
5:21, 22	Murder	Avoid killing	Have right relationships with God and others. There's no room for hate or anger at another people
5:23-26	Offerings	Offer regular gifts	Keep our hearts from coveting and materialism. All we have is God's and we need to be obedient to Him
5:27-30	Adultery	Avoid adultery	Keep our hearts, motives and thoughts pure. There's no time for lusting after someone when it's time to be faithful. That's all the time
5:31, 32	Divorce	Be legally married in the Lord, with a growing Christian only, if you are called to marriage	Live out marriage commitments giving 100% without wavering
5:33-37	Vows	Keep a vow	Avoid casual and irresponsible commitments to God or promises to people. There's no place for flakiness
5:38-47	Revenge	Seek justice for ourselves	Respectfully show mercy and love to others without being a respecter of persons
<p>Christians, more often than not, avoid committing extreme sins but regularly commit sins with which Jesus is very concerned about. In these six examples above, our real struggle with sin inwardly is exposed. Jesus pointed out in advance what kind of lives would be required of his followers. Are you living no compromise as Jesus taught you in His Word?</p>			

You remember how two of Jesus' followers came after Him from backgrounds that were completely different—even diametrically opposed. One was Matthew. He was employed as a tax man representing Roman bureaucracy. He engaged in an occupation of controversy as far as the Jews were concerned. The Jews considered Matthew a total turn-coat—a disloyal traitor. Then there was Simon an ex-member of the Zealot party who had nationalistic obsession to no end. Think about how hard it must have been for Simon to have fellowship with a former collaborationist like Matthew. Talk about difficulty and needing grace! The Spirit really did the impossible there. And you remember how Jesus prayed to the Father that His disciples and even the other believers that would eventually come after them (like you and me) would become one. He interceded, *"Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name"* (Jn. 17:11-12).

Through Jesus' redemptive work on the cross, not only did Matthew and Simon enjoy the unity of the Spirit, but so did all varieties of true believers become one. It was supernatural how they everywhere became united in agape love. How cool was that? It can happen again—it is happening in many parts of the world.

<b>Jesus Taught Us To Love Upwards And Then Outwards</b>	
<p>In Mark 12:28 a teacher of religious law asked Christ which of all the commandments was the most important one to follow. Jesus Christ mentioned two commandments at that point, one from Deuteronomy 6:5, and the other one from Leviticus 19:18. Both had to do with selfless love. Why is love so important for Christians who tend to fight? Jesus said that all of the commandments of God were for two simple reasons: to help us love God more and to help us love other people (saved and lost) as we should</p>	
<b>What else did Jesus say about love?</b>	<b>Reference</b>
God Loves us	John 3:16
We are to love God supremely	Matthew 22:37
Because God loves us, He shows His care for us every day.	Matthew 6:25-34
God wants everyone to know how much He loves them	John 17:23
God loves even those who hate him (enemies); we are to do the same by God's enabling	Matthew 5:43-47; Luke 6:35
God seeks out even those most alienated—who run the other way from him, but He won't make them serve Him or go to heaven.	Luke 15
God must be your first love ahead of all other people and things	Matthew 6:25; 10:37
You show that you love God when you obey Him in the Spirit of Christ	John 14:21; 15:10
God loves Jesus, His Son	John 5:20; 10:17
Jesus loves God	John 14:31
Those who refuse Jesus don't have God's love	John 5:41-44
Jesus loves us just as God loves Jesus	John 15:9
Jesus proved his strong love for us by dying on the cross so that we could live eternally with him, if we repent and believe in Him.	John 3:14, 15; 15:13, 14
The love between God and Jesus is the perfect example of how we are to love others	John 17:21-26
We are to love one another (John 13:34, 35) and demonstrate that love in practical ways	Matthew 5:40-42; 10:42
We are <i>not</i> to love or live for the praise of people (John 12:43), for selfish recognition	Luke 16:13

(Matthew 23:6), for earthly belongings (Luke 6:19-31), or for anything ahead of God	
Jesus' love extends to each individual no matter what they have done. If they are alive, they can humbly turn away from their sinful lifestyle to God and be saved	Mark 10:21; John 10:11-15
Jesus wants us to love him through the good and through the difficult times	Matthew 26:31-35
Jesus wants our love to be genuine and non-fickle	John 21:15-17

And accordingly, Paul spoke of the Christian Church as one body with Christ as their one Head with all the believers acting as cooperating members. Paul wanted all believers to be contributing constituents—each one a vital part of the Body as they fit well together for the common good. Practical organizational unity of a church, a denomination or a movement must always be secondary to the spiritual organic unity that we enjoy and experience together as Christians.

I personally remember sensing that kind of strong spiritual unity at different Christian events like at Greg Laurie's evangelistic Harvest Crusades or at Billy Graham fishing crusades. We all came from so many different churches, we worshipped together with great joy, we came from so many different cultural backgrounds and yet we were one in the Spirit. We were not divided at all! It was a real love-in! It's one body with one living hope, with one main doctrine—it doesn't get any better than that! Heaven will be like that. This kind of spiritual kinship and fellowship vastly transcends all natural or biological family relationships. God has appointed all born again believers to be conformed into the image of His beloved Son so ***"that He might be the firstborn among many brethren"*** (Rom. 8:29). And all of us sons are brothers of Jesus Christ our big brother. So why would we ever want to get unbrotherly-like at church? How could start a fight with someone who is our brother in God's family? In the family room of God's house on earth (the church), let's agree to disagree on secondary things if we can't come into full agreement, but let's never allow verbally destructive communication, bad teaching, or vicious men to hurt or drive away the flock!

Remember how Ananias warmly welcomed his new friend the ex-persecutor calling him "Brother Saul," when others wouldn't even get close to him (see Acts 9:17). In later years humble Paul never forgot the kindness of Ananias or from the Lord for giving him back his sight.

The hearts of true Christians are knit together in an invisible yet holy spiritual relationship. There is a level of intimacy there. I like what the Apostles' Creed calls it: *"The communion of saints."* And that was never referring to our communication with saints that have already passed on. That is not for us to take part in. But we all believe in the spiritual unity of all believers formed around the Person of Christ and the Essentials our historic faith! Beyond that we choose to give other Christians the freedom to believe what they want—what they each arrive at with the Word. We can continue to vigorously debate about these things too.

## **Fights Can Happen ...If We Let Them**

Can you think of an earthly family with kids that have never had a fight? They don't have to happen, but what do we do if they do? We pray and obey.

In writing this, I'm not talking about types of church government here, or authority structures per se, even though unbiblical structures and setups can promote many problems. I want to talk about family unity, harmony and elevating the social-ministry IQ of leaders and Christians in churches that are experiencing way too much strife ...over things that really shouldn't be fought over. A fight can happen. It's so childish! The mature must get involved to restore the order and peace. Not all leaders are ready for this.

A leader can have knowledge, insight and a high IQ socially in some areas and be spiritually stunted or socially retarded in other areas of basic common courtesy. They can have a low SIQ (social or relational IQ). You know, like in the basics of how to be respectful and get along with others. Once a person is put in a "position," good behavior shouldn't fly out the window! It shouldn't go to their head. But many of God's children simply don't play or work well with others. They get puffed up. Some Christians are in high school mentally so to speak and yet at the same time they can be in third grade behaviorally. And it's really amazingly how we find some of these babies leading people in churches ...possibly because they are merely related to an existing leader. Spiritual Christians, leaders and pastors ought to act like what they are called to. Carnal is as carnal thinks—carnal is as carnal does—carnal is as carnal speaks! Followers of Christ who become carnal troublemakers (among the leadership or laity of a local church) need to be acutely aware of the fact that there are legitimate consequences for what they are doing wrong. God is strong, non-passive and sees all—He will deal with each person accordingly.

## **Who Even Wants To Hang with Troublemakers Anyway?**

Every Christian leader unfortunately must handle church squabbles. They must also deal with those in the Church who simply believe that God has called them to start fights to clean up the church ...even when it's not in a messy condition. Christian leaders are called to wisely disciple those who mistakenly feel that they are uber-reformer-saints with the specialized duty of doing more than mere spiritual warfare against all changes taking place at that specific local church ...even when certain changes are needed. Every pastor I know has had moments where they had to address those who are angry, seething-bitter or wounded who seem to start scuffles with every other church person they come across, or fight against any new Church developments that the leadership there want to enact, yes even if the developments are very good and directed by the Lord (such as creative corporate evangelistic efforts out in the neighborhoods where the unbelievers are).

Yes, Christians often try to keep it a secret, but every church has difficult people—sincere, well meaning alleged Christians who have a propensity for fighting. They leave ulcers, problems, strained relationships, and hard feelings behind them in their wake. Have you ever read the excellent book by author, Marshall Shelley, titled *Well-Intentioned Dragons*?<sup>2</sup> He asserts that difficult church people are like dragons. He teaches that these people certainly don't intend to be

difficult for the most part; they don't consciously plot wide-spread destruction or plan to breed discontent among the church's constituents... but they often do undermine the ministry of the church with truly bizarre and painful fights that become fierce conflicts that it can make a pastor question his own calling. He describes how dragons are known for what comes out of their mouths—fire. At times their mouths are flame throwers. At other times the sparks, heat and smoke that proceed from these individuals is not readily apparent, but their noxious gases cause much damage. Their tongues may be smooth like butter, sweet like honey, but they are usually forked—duplicitous in an evil way.

<b>Biblical Church Discipline</b>
The Church and the people in it are God's property. He acts as a good Father because He is one. He wants things safe for His children. The local church must represent Him well or people will get the wrong ideas about His good nature and holy character. God loves people so much that he hates all that would destroy people. Therefore church leaders must be and act right in this. The local church, at times, must exercise discipline toward members who have sinned or who continue to sin, but church discipline must be handled biblically, carefully, straightforwardly, and lovingly with the aim to see the offender restored in Christ. It is a somber thing that should wake people up so that they will quit dabbling with what's evil and stop playing around with sin. The fear of God that can come from this discipline is a good type of fear.
<b>Situations</b>
Unintentional error and/or private sin
Public sin and/or those done flagrantly and arrogantly
<b>Steps (Matthew 18:15-17)</b>
1. Go to the brother or sister in a humble but direct way; clearly showing the fault to him or her in private
2. If he/she does not listen, go with one or two witnesses.
3. If he/she refuses to listen, take the matter before the leaders who are in delegated authority in the church. If it is the top pastor, find the one in authority over him and stick to the facts rather than to hear-say feelings or conjecture
<b>After these steps have been carried out, the next steps are</b>
1. Remove the loved sinner who is in error from the church fellowship (see 1 Corinthians 5:2-13).
2. The church is to give united disapproval of the sin, but forgiveness and comfort are in order if he/she chooses to repent (2 Corinthians 2:5-8).
3. Do not associate with the disobedient person; and if you must, speak to him/her as one who needs witnessing or a warning (see 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15).
4. the Bible says that after two warnings, deliberately reject the person from the fellowship (Titus 3:10).

The tongue of a troublemaker loves to start fights and to wreak havoc and destruction wherever it is found. In general, James compares the tongue to a small spark that can explode into a full-

blown blaze. He says, ***“The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell”*** (Jam 3:5-6, nkjv).

People don't realize how dangerous it can be to abide in a bone-dry-tinderbox of a congregation along with a few trouble makers who are given free reign to say and do as they please. Even the leaders could potentially be singed by their personal attacks, but probably not by them through direct fire-blasts. When it comes to communication within a church with your brothers and sisters in Christ, wise direct communication—with an underlying motive to build up the person in love—is better than indirect.

Of course a Christian leader should never mind being confronted or challenged about how they are leading or about what they are teaching. It should all be biblical and ethical. There is such a thing as respectful loyal dissent and all Christians will undoubtedly have the opportunity to properly express this type of dissent as they submit to authority and properly interact with their leaders in a local church setting; as they continue to test what they are hearing taught against what the authoritative Bible says. But the kind of scalawags I'm mainly talking about here, more often than not, tend to be more covert than overt, seeking-out like-minded negative-thinkers—looking for warriors in the congregation, people who deal in the ugly disloyal type of dissent.

Just like that serpent we see in Genesis 3, their strategy is one of planting questions in people's minds, at first seemingly innocent questions, but with the result of raising doubts about the pastor's competence, credibility, ministry, or motives. They want the listener to learn to distrust their leaders even if these people are very trustworthy and above reproach. Be careful who you make your best friends. The Bible says, ***“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’”*** (1 Cor. 15:33, nasb). It says, ***“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed”*** (Pro 13:20, nkjv). It commands us to: ***“pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels”*** (2 Ti 2:22-24, nasb). Paul said, ***“I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one”*** (1 Cor. 5:11, nasb).

### **You've Undoubtedly Seen Power-plays**

Not all attacks by leaders of rascals are personal or for the purpose of tearing leadership down though; sometimes the play is simply for power. Some congregants crave power and position—they love titles and want to feel significant. They utilize clever political tactics to influence decisions such as in choosing a new collective direction for the flock, or new interior design for the sheep-shed, or a new curriculum for their school, or certain spending limits for an upcoming construction project instead of giving to missions as the church has already committed to doing. They of course, have good reasons for their power-lust; usually because the church is heading in a direction that they think needs to be adjusted for God's glory. When two groups led by influential lay leaders differ over the goals and direction of the church, look out! Big-time tensions and strife can arise quickly as they each try to schmooze and politic to their own

advantage or to gain the upper hand. All the ingredients are there for a fierce fight of folly ... with all those typical results, fallout and spiritual casualties, as well. The first century church knew what this was all about having that painful type of division in a church. They had to stop and address some key problems head-on too, until they were totally resolved.

The Apostle Paul told of a power struggle he experienced with "false brothers" (those of the circumcision party) over the expectations they laid on Gentile believers (see Galatians 2). They were demanding that all new non-Jewish Christians be circumcised and meet Jewish lifestyle standards before joining a local church, but hooray a thousand times for Paul who put his foot down and firmly insisted that true repentance with faith in Jesus alone was the biblical prerequisite. No one can earn righteousness among Jews or Gentiles.

### **Defend the Innocent**

I remember doing a lot of Landscaping in California in the '70s and I know that the best way to keep those pesky weeds from taking over in a yard is not necessarily to attack each one full force individually. Sure, rooting out weeds one by one might improve the look of your garden's appearance for a short time, but it will only be a little while longer before those bothersome plants return with a vengeance. Here is what we would do when we landscaped a new home in Laguna Beach—we proactively grew a nice healthy lawn! Think about it, when the ground is totally covered with thick green grass in a yard, it will keep the weeds from springing up where they ought not to be.

That reminds me of what Paul said, ***“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”*** (Rom. 12:21). God wants you and I to trounce evil out by doing good—by doing His will. Pastors are not called to greed but to feed, with all the counsels of God's Word—that's how the whole lawn greens healthy and evenly. Be so busy obeying the Spirit that you don't have time left to rebel, to sin, to fight with people. If pastors are only feeding their lawn so to speak with their own pet doctrines (even if they are scriptural), the church will indeed miss out on equally important nourishment that God wants them to receive from other parts of the Bible. Leaders need to ask themselves: Is God's lawn here (I mean the saved congregation), greening evenly or are there major burn patterns, stripes, scorched earth spots here or there? The Holy Spirit is committed to seeing the whole lawn get the whole nine yards, so won't you be as well. Leaders are charged to look: ***“carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled”*** (Heb. 12:15). Pastors are responsible to prevent determined-nuisances from destroying God's flock. They are called to develop a healthy church by love, faith, obedience and by the Scriptures, as they practice what they preach. What pastors “build it with” is what they will have to keep employing to maintain it, so why build a church up primarily on entertainment, gifts, so called supernatural phenomenon, fads, or what the people always want? Christians don't always know what is best for them, but God's Word does. Defusing the problems scripturally, that wicked agitators try to create in a church ... before the problems grow to take on epic proportions or more negative-significance is much better than being forced to do troubleshooting later.

We all need to regularly encourage an uplifting harmonious atmosphere of brotherly love, especially the leaders who are feeders. Let's face it; we were made from the dirt, and dirt relates

to dirt—I mean the lower stuff of this world. At any given time, any of us Christians could react in the flesh instead of walking in the Spirit. God calls us to walk in the Spirit and become peacemakers, so daily we must sow to the Spirit aggressively in private in order not to become fleshly. Some churches enjoy fighting. So do some pastors. Feisty, do-or-die leaders have a way of developing feisty churches. Fighters must fight—they love a heated knock-down-drag-out brawl. In the military, generals and admirals are never more thrilled as when they are drawn into a big full-scale war. Prize fighters are never so happy as when they are boxing and pounding their opponents face into the mat until the person is unconscious and they are proclaimed the victor.

Pastor, build a healthy leadership team and board (not with merely the “top donors” but with spiritually balanced mature people). Tight spiritual cohesiveness from a basis of health in Christ matters among the leadership in a church. Pastor, when your inner circle of leaders are committed to seeing God work among them to build up His Church worldwide—fighting all the infectious worldly attitudes and teachings that present themselves at times, then you are blessed!

Are troublemakers sometimes right? Do they ever share truth with the right tone, approach and attitude? Do they often have good motives and intentions? Does God still love them—did Christ die for them? You know that the answer to these questions is yes. But who enjoys hearing their alleged helpful criticism, especially when it’s coming from such a personality who has proven to be a creative problem-architect? It would seem that their “constructive” comments more often than not do connect with the people you are trying to properly lead, like a flying destruction company’s wrecking ball. I personally don’t know of too many churches that don’t have such a challenge for their leadership (in the form of a unique person) with them. And I do think that what these individuals say could be beneficial for the flock in the long run, but still the immediate effect is more often than not, detrimental. Listen, God honors His Word, but he expects the words, attitudes and the behavior of His children to match-up and not contradict what the Bible teaches. Troublemakers can quote godly men—many have lots of head knowledge regarding the Bible and sometimes what they say is right. All humble pastors are even willing to benefit if the criticism is valid. The Bible says, ***“Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than a hundred blows on a fool”*** (Prov. 17:10, nkjv). It says, ***“Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you”*** (Prov. 9:8). Moreover it admonishes, ***“Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge”*** (Prov. 19:25). These verses seem to address the receptivity of the hearer, more than the tone and tact of the rebuker using truth, but here are some verses that laud a person who corrects using God’s wisdom as we all would prefer: ***“It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools”*** (Eccl. 7:5). Psalm 141:5 lets us know what makes correction easier to receive stating, ***“Let a righteous man strike me — it is a kindness; let him rebuke me — it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.”*** The words of the righteous—those who are born again according to John 3:3, balanced, spiritually mature and discerning, must be taken more seriously than impulsive fools. Basically, our goal is to determine which criticisms from the troublemaker (or anyone) are applicable, justifiable and valid ...and which ones are not—which attacks are fair and unfair. We should be able to learn from anyone. We desire to rightly represent the Lord with excellence.

If there is discord and strife, consider the source of it. Ask specific intelligent questions at the right time to discover the inner motivations of the critics, with respect and gentleness. Remember

that biblical confrontation is not baptizing the troublemaker with a baseball bat. It's not silencing those who disagree with us, employing scare tactics and threats "in Jesus Name." It's not taking a vindictive hateful approach to secretly try to hurt the person bad enough ...until they give you peace by leaving, as your flesh might feel like doing. No, the goal of a Christian leader confronting isn't to slay people; it's to obey Christ. Love would seek to protect others at all times. We are to listen well and also candidly confront people in love when they are wrong ...with the aim to see them fully restored when they repent. Sure there will be times when a pastor will sadly need to disfellowship a stubborn unrepentant rabble-rouser when they refuse to repent ...for the protection of the flock. I've unfortunately had to do that before, but that's biblical even though it's not politically correct in our society.

We do our very best to please the Lord, to be in His will and to rely upon His power to live as we believe, but the problems that contentious people start are often not quickly stopped. Frictions and tensions can hang with a church or family for a long time, with no resolution in sight. Prayer and fasting might be in order. The persistent unnecessary resistance, the nay-saying, the murmuring, the fruitless second-guessing all seem to be such a grueling trial for leaders. It can wear them out if they are not careful to put Christ first.

I know several pastors who use gripe-worry-diaries ...I mean *prayer journals* to deal with their subtle rabble-rousers long term. If a leader can remember to express thanks and praise to God in those journals (not for the problem but in it, I mean for the good that God is teaching them through all this), then that journaling of their intimate prayers will certainly become a great tool for personal growth and further personal maturation. All of us should go to God with it first and then go address it when the time is right. All pastors must learn to deal with unresolved situations—some temporarily, until the rebel or the *sower of discord* is convicted, contrite, repentant, tamed, or properly driven off.

Fights, strife, bickering and contentiousness in a home or in a church are of course due to original sin and someone's bad choice. Listen, every time that I have ever been tempted to fight with people as a Christian, my fleshly nature is all for it rooting me on into a slug-fest-punch-out, but I have to die to that. Dead men simply don't respond if they are cussed at or provoked. Each of us can choose to be humble or choose to be haughty. Where there is fighting, there you can find pride with at least one person that's involved. The Bible tells us this: "***Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom***" (Prov. 13:10, kjv). The Corinthian church was whacked with carnality and divided. It really disgusted the Apostle Paul, who wrote to them with tart sarcasm: "***No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval***" (1 Cor. 11:19). That was a good rebuke, but a few verses later (v. 22), with Paul's sarcasm now set on the shelf, he went on to express his feelings frankly: "***What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!***" If you are a leader who buries his head in the sand like an ostrich, or looks the other way due to preferential treatment when underlings are going at it, then you need to be rebuked. Speak up and put a halt to that weirdness now.

### **If You're Tempted To Flesh-out... No Excuses; Just Do this:**

- *Die to what your fleshly nature wants. Don't go with your feelings. Mortify your fleshly nature and all the deeds of the flesh. Say no to sin! Crucify self, ego and your own way. People generally won't fight long with themselves; fighters want someone to participate with them. Instead of*

*being contentious or sexually deviant, be a real Christian leader “vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous” (1 Tim 3:3, kjv). The Apostle Paul said, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:12-14, kjv). It’s very hard to party with or fight with a dead man. They won’t take a swing at you and they won’t take a hit off your blunt. Paul also said this, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience” (Col 3:5-6, kjv).*

- *Pursue a peaceful relationship with all types of people, if they will allow it.*
- *Purpose to become a peacemaker by God’s Spirit and never fight with people (unless you are a military soldier in a just war or a husband and someone has broken into your home to hurt your family). Our battle is not against flesh and blood. In your heart forgive people who have hurt you and your friends. The real enemy wants to drag as many people off to hell as he can.*
- *Sow to the Spirit aggressively and regularly (in the Word, in prayer, in fellowship with Growing born again Christians and in winsome witnessing by life, deed and word) so you will be strong enough not to react in the flesh.*
- *Give up your own agenda and make God’s agenda the priority.*
- *Choose to be humble; there is room for growth and for learning with all of us. You and I don’t know it all.*
- *If you are employed in a church where cruelty and poor judgment are the rule of the day among top leaders, simply look for other work, give notice and leave.*
- *If you’re a member in a local church where the leaders are fleshly sheep beaters and they don’t express God’s love for the lost, or for the saved servants there, then try to talk with the pastor alone and if he is closed-minded and proud, then vote with your feet and bail. Life is too short to waste it with fools.*
- *Pray intensely for God’s Church and His leaders. Commit yourself to regular attendance in a healthy Christ-honoring Church with saved spiritual pastors who are strong in the Word and kind. If you have no healthy church, your priority is to find one or wisely relocate to where one is.*
- *Represent Him well at all times.*
- *Have compassion and a global missions vision for reaching the lost of this world. If we are busy seeking the Lord and working together to win the lost at home and abroad, then we won’t have time for backbiting, strife and infighting.*

Fleshly power struggles or legitimate arguments?—fights are often about who should have authority and the privilege to exercise authority in the church. They’re also about who should not have authority or who is not qualified to exercise authority in the church. The Bible gives various levels of leaders different criteria to meet, because God cares for His sheep and wants them protected. Having godly character, spiritually maturity and a working knowledge of the Scriptures does matter! There are clear different qualifications for deacons and elders and unfortunately we have countless men and women in ministry today who do not meet the Bible’s qualifications to lead.

You may be able to compel people to maintain certain minimum standards by stressing duty, but the highest moral and spiritual achievements depend not upon a push but a pull. People must be charmed into righteousness.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

James explained why Christians fight and how Christians can live in peace with each other (4:1–10). Our battles among ourselves are caused because we obey our three enemies instead of the

Lord: the world (James 4:4), the flesh (4:1), and the devil (4:7). How can we expect to be at peace with God and with each other if we are living for the enemy! It's obvious that, "**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God**" (4:6–7, NKJV). If we are busy about seeking God and doing His will by witnessing and helping other Christians to grow (vv. 19–21) we surely won't have enough time to be fighting with each other over petty little things.

Not the externals, but the eternal must be prioritized in our lives: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Where do these things come from? Again, the Spirit of God is at work in our lives (see Rom. 5:1–2). If each believer would yield to the Holy Spirit and major on living a godly life with godly character, we would not have Christians dukeing it out with each other over minor matters. Spiritual priorities are essential to harmony and unity in the church!

How can a group of Christians fight the real enemy? The Bible says, "**The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh**" (2 Cor. 10:4, nasb). You remember how Pete took up a sword in the Garden, and Jesus then rebuked him (see Jn. 18:10–11). We must use spiritual weapons—the Word of God and faith-filled prayer (see Eph. 6:11–18; Heb. 4:12); and we depend on the Spirit of Christ to give us the power and victory that we need. But an army must fight together or they could get bored and start to fight each other. You see Christians were designed by God to take ground, to gain lives for Jesus, to conquer and advance the Gospel. If they get inverted and refuse to fish for souls (evangelize) they will get carnivorous-like and start to backbite and consume inwardly. The pastor must set the soul-winning example and prayerfully keeping the people looking out, reaching out, witnessing exuberantly, dynamically, in faith!

If you won't evangelize,  
you will fossilize.  
—R.G. Lee

Fellowship can be SO good in God's church. It can be SO great in a family as well. Bible-based fellowship builds family members up as a defense against noxious-faith and infighting. Fellowship is SO necessary! Think about this; even a strong pastor that doesn't get any honest heart-to-heart fellowship with a small group of growing believers or with maybe a few, because maybe he's wanting to protect and keep everything confidential, can grow weak, carnal and mean. Any of us could. It's imperative for us to sow to the Spirit in fellowship first upwards and then with on-fire believers! God's Word instructs us all not to forsake "**the assembling of ourselves together**" (Heb. 10:25). Several logs on a camp bonfire burn brightly together; but put one aside on the cold sand away from the others and it will be no time at all before that branch on fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians. If you do not belong to a church, to a small Bible study please don't wait to be invited. Take the initiative; call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ and His Word are honored. Be proactive, spiritually aggressive, start this week, and make plans to attend regularly or your there will be more family fights that we don't need.

A motorist asked a boy where the Reformed Church was located, and was told; "Go one block south and you'll see a church on the corner. That's the United Church. Go one block more, and you'll come upon a church that's not united. That's it!"

Unity is to be more than a mere name, but the every church does have its friction. Though we need each other, sometimes we needle—or slash—each other. We can get on friction-overload and explode. Even Paul, the strong advocate and contender of unity that he was, happen to find himself embroiled in both personal and ecclesiastical disputes at times. But "church fights" of the New Testament frankly acknowledge the flawed foibles of early saints along with their good qualities. I love how the Bible doesn't hide the warts of believers.

You remember how the young church's first recorded conflict concerned the complaint of Grecians against Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily food distribution ministry (Acts 6:1-6).

Remember how Paul publicly rebuked his friend Peter who was so hasty and impulsive in his open display of prejudice towards Gentile believers (Gal. 2:11-14). Pete was clearly in the wrong and Paul lovingly called him on it so that he wouldn't misrepresent before others who needed to learn.

Or maybe you recall when those who still clung to the practice of circumcision criticized Peter for bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 11:2-3). Criticizing can start fights sometimes if the one on the receiving end isn't mature. Yes, the same reason caused "*No small dissension and disputation*" between Paul and the zealous advocates of circumcision. There's a big difference between criticizing which is holding your self above the other person like you are somehow above sinning and rebuking which is aimed to help.

*Don't be a wimp! Those who live are those who fight. Just make sure you're fighting the real enemy—the enemy of your soul. —KvS*

## Destructively Criticizing God's Leaders Misses The Mark

Leaders aren't perfect so we should pray for them. If they appear to be in error and hurting people, criticizing God's leaders won't help the situation. We are to respect authority wherever we find it even if we can't respect the wrong behavior on one in authority. We are to prayerfully use the Scriptures to appeal to leaders who seem to be, or indeed are sinning. Jumping to conclusions about others can be very costly.

Person/Situation	Result	Reference
Miriam: Mocked Moses because he had a Cushite wife	Stricken with leprosy	Numbers 12
Korah and followers: Led the people of Israel to rebel against Moses' leadership	Swallowed by the earth	Numbers 16
Michal: Despised David because he danced before the Lord	Remained childless	2 Samuel 6
Shimei: Cursed and threw stones at David	Executed at Solomon's order	2 Samuel 16 1 Kings 2
Youths: Mocked Elisha and laughed at his baldness	Killed by bears	2 Kings 2
Sanballat and Tobiah: Spread rumors and lies to stop the building of Jerusalem's walls	Frightened and humiliated	Nehemiah 2, 4, 6
Hananiah: Contradicted Jeremiah's prophecies with false predictions	Died two months later	Jeremiah 28
Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer: Lied about Paul in an attempt to turn the proconsul against him	Stricken with blindness	Acts 13

Some of the critics of Peter who believed in the practice of circumcision thought that this practice was essential for one to obtain salvation (15:1-2). And that controversy was the issue that kicked off the first church council along with "*much debate*" among its leaders (Acts 11:7 nasb).

## The First Church Council

Group	Position	Reasons
The Judaizers (some Jewish saints)	Gentiles must become Jewish first in order to become eligible for salvation	1. They were devout, practicing Jews who found it difficult to set aside a tradition of gaining merit with God by keeping the law.
		2. They thought grace was too easy for the Gentiles.
		3. They were afraid of seeming too non-Jewish in the practice of their new faith—which could lead to death.
		4. The demands on the Gentiles were a way of maintaining some control and authority in the early church movement.
Gentile Christians	Faith in Christ as Savior is the only requirement for salvation	1. To submit to Jewish demands would be to doubt what God had already done for them by grace alone. This is what is true: <b>People are saved by Grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone, yes with nothing added to it.</b>
		2. They resisted exchanging their pagan rituals for a system of Jewish rituals—neither of which had power to save.
		3. They sought to obey Christ by baptism (rather than by circumcision) as a sign of their new faith.
Peter and James	Faith is the only requirement, but there must be evidence of change by rejecting the old life-style	1. They tried to distinguish between what was true from God's Word and what was just human tradition.
		2. They had Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all the people living in the world.
		3. They wanted to preserve unity.
		4. They saw that Christianity could never survive as just a sect within Judaism.

As long as most of the first Christians were Jewish, there was little difficulty in welcoming new believers; however, Gentiles (or non-Jews) began to accept Jesus' offer of salvation. This became challenging for some people. The evidence in their lives and the presence of God's Spirit in them showed that God was fully accepting them. Some of the early Christians believed that non-Jewish Christians needed to meet certain conditions before they could be worthy to accept Christ. This issue even if they held the bar low works-wise, could have destroyed the early church, so it became necessary for a conference to be held in Jerusalem, and the issue was formally settled there, although this issue did continue to be a problem for many years to following. These Jews grew up in one way, and now everything seemed to have changed. Change is hard on any of us and there could be potential fights. Above is an outline of the three points of view at that conference.

What a bummer it was when the Corinthian church, on the verge of splitting, had carnal factions pushing hard and campaigning for **“own different leaders”** (1 Cor. 1:11-12). There is a friction that can fray and fracture friendly fellowship! Paul said, **“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life”** (1 Tim. 6:12). He didn’t mean sock your brother in the mouth. A good fight is fought in a prayer meeting for world missions—not in striving against other Christians. You remember how the Corinthian division just widened when spiritual brothers went to court against each other (6:1-11), and the *righteous-well-to-do* declined to selflessly share their food with the poor at church in the so called **“love feasts”** that had turned into self-love-parties (11:18-23).

Two factions that developed in Rome started over two things: whether to eat meat associated with idol sacrifices and the observance of the Sabbath day (Rom. 14:1-6). Hints of such needling, disputing and preferential display resulting in contention among early saints did crop up. Paul referred to the Galatians' biting and devouring one another (5:15). He exhorted the Philippians to **“do everything without complaining or arguing”** (2:14, niv). James implied that there were small battles among the brethren when he asked the source of their **“wars and fightings among you?”** (4:1). He traced this to lust, selfish ambition and to bitter jealousy in their hearts (3:14). It was a lust for preeminence that led the infamous “church-boss” Diotrephes to throw fellow brethren out of the church. I’m sure you’ve met people like this, **“Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church”** (3 Jn. 1:11). Do you understand people that feel the need to be the boss when they lack what it takes? The Bible says, **“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil”** (3 John 9-10). Somebody once wrote: To dwell above with saints we love, that will be grace and glory! To live below with saints we know; that's another story!

### **Keeping Peace in God’s Family**

Relatives have good reasons for strong relationships normally, but brothers who are unbrotherly are barbaric. How can one’s own relative become a traitor? It happens sometimes. The indifferent response of Cain to the Lord’s question that was broached to him after his fratricide of his biological brother Able was simply chilling. He retorted: **“Am I my brother's keeper?”** (Gen. 4:9). Hello! Man, Cain was clueless! WE ARE TO BE—EACH ONE OF US ARE TO BE OUR BROTHER’S KEEPER ...EVERY SINGLE DAY! And before doing all else, that concern ought to be expressed in prayer for your brother (or for your sister). Your family ought to be a safe place to be.

A church family should also be a warm safe and mutually supporting place. Though committed believers will be hated for the Gospel’s sake at times from outsiders, they should be able with God’s help to get along with each other. **“Our church has unity—we be like frozen together,”** joked one Christian. For believers to function in cold blooded friction is like a car running with a tire scraping the fender until it’s bald. It doesn’t last. For believers to bitterly separate from other genuine Christians and speak of “them” as opposed to “us” is as incongruous as for a hand to consider itself independent from the heart that pumps blood into it. We must beware of promoting a **“many-bodies-of-Christ”** stance. Rather, believers are different parts of one body, and all belong to Christ.

The Spirit never wants schism, but solidarity in Christ's body. The elbow has need of the arm; the eye has need of the ear, as does the hand of the foot. Competition is like a cleaver that severs the body, but Spirit-led tending is like a balm that comforts and coordinates the Body.

Since the unity of the Spirit is a reality in Christ, we do not try to originate it, but we must make every effort to extend His unifying influence to other Christians and also win outsiders into this union. At the start of Paul's practical exhortations to the Ephesians, he urged: *"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (4:3). To do so will require the supernatural graces that are spoken of in the preceding verse: humility, patience, gentleness and forbearance in the face of faults which displease and even offend people (v. 2).

The need for unity always took high priority in Paul's motif for the local church. It takes a choice daily. Over and over again Paul encouraged the pursuit of peace among saints. *"Live in harmony with one another"* (Rom. 12:16, niv). *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* (v. 18). *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace"* (14:19). *"Be at peace among yourselves"* (1 Thess. 5:13). Listen, if you lose respect for your leadership because they continue to do damage to individuals in private or in public, and are not open to listening to reason when you respectfully appeal to them ...the jig is up! Don't stay there trying to fix a "sinker" (a sick church) vote with your feet and bail so you can go find a healthy church with humble bible-loyal leadership that you can respect.

Leaders are to have a vital role in peacekeeping not fight provoking with people; therefore their character should be free of belligerence, pride, violence, narcissism, rebellion, quarrelsomeness, and impetuosity (see 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). The Lord's servant must be kind to everyone (2 Tim. 2:24).

<b>Prideful Rebellion Will Often Start Fights</b>			
The Bible doesn't hide rebellions, but records them for us to learn from. Many were against God's chosen obedient leaders. They were doomed for failure! Others were begun by wicked men against other wicked men. While these were sometimes successful, the rebel's life usually came to a violent end. Still other rebellions were made by good people against the wicked or unjust actions of others. This kind of decent is sometimes good in freeing the common people from oppressive pain and giving them the freedom to worship God in a healthy situation. Great care and wisdom must be applied when rulers become harmful. Like Saul, some like to throw spears to kill.			
<b>Who rebelled?</b>	<b>Whom they rebelled against</b>	<b>What happened</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>Adam and Eve</b> (in a perfect environment)	God (a perfect Father)	Expelled from Eden	Genesis 3
<b>Israelites</b>	God, Moses	Forced to wander in wilderness for 40 years	Numbers 14
<b>Korah</b>	Moses	Swallowed by the earth	Numbers 16

<b>Israelites</b>	God	God took away his special promise of protection	Judges 2
<b>Absalom</b> (David's son)	David	Killed in battle	2 Samuel 15-18
<b>Sheba</b>	David	Killed in battle	2 Samuel 20
<b>Adonijah</b> (David's son)	David, Solomon	Killed for treason	1 Kings 1, 2
<b>Joab</b>	David, Solomon	Supported Adonijah's kingship without seeking God's choice. Killed for treason	1 Kings 1, 2
<b>Ten tribes of Israel</b>	Rehoboam	The kingdom was divided. The 10 tribes forgot about God, sinned, and were eventually taken into captivity	1 Kings 12:16-20
<b>Baasha, king of Israel</b>	Nadab king of Israel	Overthrew the throne and became king. God destroyed his descendants	1 Kings 15:27-16:7
<b>Zimri, king of Israel</b>	Elah king of Israel	Overthrew the throne, but killed himself when his rule was not accepted	1 Kings 16:9-16
<b>Jehu, king of Israel</b>	Joram king of Israel Ahaziah king of Judah	Killed both kings. Later turned from God and his dynasty was wiped out	2 Kings 9, 10
<b>Joash, king of Judah</b> <b>Jehoiada, a priest</b>	Athaliah queen of Judah	Athaliah, a wicked queen, was overthrown. This was a "good" rebellion	2 Kings 11
<b>Shallum, king of Israel</b>	Zechariah king of Israel	Overthrew the throne, but then was assassinated	2 Kings 15:8-15
<b>Menahem, king of Israel</b>	Shallum king of Israel	Overthrew the throne, but then was invaded by Assyrian army	2 Kings 15:16-22
<b>Hoshea, king of Israel</b>	Assyria	The city of Samaria was destroyed, the nation of Israel taken into captivity	2 Kings 17
<b>Zedekiah, king of Judah</b>	Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon	The city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the nation of Judah taken into captivity	2 Kings 24, 25

If you insist upon rebelling, then please rebel whole heartedly in the right way. Rebel against this world's system that tells you to do what it tells you to do! Rebel against your fleshly impulses and against all the temptations of Satan! If you obey what the Bible says, and of course the Holy Spirit will always agree with that, then it will go well for you. You might have some troubles and trials on earth for a while, but ultimately it will go real well for you. God honors those who obey and honor Him.

Obedience Is Better Than Sacrifice	
Deuteronomy 8:1 tells us to obey God's commandments. We do this by obeying God with...	
<b>OUR HEART</b>	By loving him more than any relationship, activity, achievement, or possession
<b>OUR WILL</b>	By committing ourselves completely to him
<b>OUR MIND</b>	By seeking to know him and his Word, so his principles and values form the foundation of all we think and do
<b>OUR BODY</b>	By recognizing that our strengths, talents, and sexuality are given to us by God to be used for pleasure and fulfillment according to his rules, not ours
<b>OUR FINANCES</b>	By deciding that all of the resources we have ultimately come from God, and that we are to be managers of them and not owners
<b>OUR FUTURE</b>	By deciding to make service to God and man the main purpose of our life's work

And know this; Paul does not push "peace at any price." Scandal, factional schism, and distortion of basic Bible doctrine require disciplinary action, because purity in faith and clean conduct is essential to Christian unity. Sometimes disfellowshipping an unrepentant sinning rebel—such as was found at the church in Corinth—is necessary for maintaining the peace and the strength of the churches witness in the world (1 Cor. 5:1-5).

Paul said, *"The Lord's servants must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone"* (2 Tim. 2:24). You see the cost of enjoying the peace of God with other Christians is kindhearted righteous living! John said, *"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren"* (1 Jn. 3:14 nasb). Yes, righteous living actually stems from a right relationship with Jesus who is kind. It's the by-product of cultivating a sound faith in God who is kind. Thus, gaining and maintaining peace in God's family requires divine help too. Righteous relationships, based on faith in God are a basic necessity for every believer. He is a God of order and is called *"the God of peace"* multiple times in the Word (see Rom. 16:20; Heb. 13:20; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:16). The division-torn church at Corinth was addressed by Paul when he said, *"God is not a God of confusion, but of peace"* (1 Cor. 14:33, nasb). So you've got to believe that the ultimate healer of every church rift is the Prince of peace. Nobody relishes time at church or even life at home if either place pulsates with antagonism, reverberates with tension. If there are big heads, small hearts, medium sized feuding or power-plays, then no child of the house will be a happy camper there. Peace and pride don't coexist well together for the Word exclaims *"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom"* (Proverbs 13:10). The Psalmist declared, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Ps. 133:1).

*O Lord, help us to turn aside from words that spring from selfish pride,  
For You would have Your children one in praise and love for Your dear Son.*  
—DeHaan

People who get caught up in petty little church squabbles have lost sight of what a local church is really for. They aren't even thinking about the collective witness they need to be presenting to those in their community. ***"Where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"*** (1 Cor. 3:3). Healthy churches are where we go for ardent passionate worship, for the clear public reading and study of the Scriptures, for whole-hearted singing to God for His pleasure and glory, for the selfless serving others, and for helping one another to grow and fish better. The church is supposed to be a place of true love, safe fellowship, complete forgiveness, and constant encouragement. At church or outside of it, we might get sinned against by another saint or sinner, but we must in our hearts keep releasing that offender. This keeps you free. You remember Peter asking Jesus how many times his choice to forgive should be employed—seven times? But Jesus replied saying, ***"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven"*** (Matt. 18:22).

In Paul's epistle to the congregation in Ephesus, he described the pure unity of purpose that they as a church should enjoy (4:1-16), and should help them work through all disagreements without producing any divisions and squabbles. He knew all too well how selfish desires, personal agendas, and playing favorites could create horrific havoc (1 Cor. 3:1-9). We've got to make sure that our churches are trustworthy havens, bulwarks against skirmishes of the flesh by remembering what a church is for.

Jesus courageously took a stand against the money hungry selling in the temple and cleaned house. It still takes guts to take a stand and properly express outrage about church abuses of our day. True Christians are zealous and want to see a sick situation fixed. They will pray, but simply won't lie down long and hope all the junk just goes away by osmosis. They will speak up, especially if some are being hurt.

Jeremiah saw things the way they were and he couldn't shut up long. He sensed the Word's power and plan. He said, ***"like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not"*** (Jeremiah 20:9). Jeremiah and Jesus refused to be lay-downs that would compromise. Living for God is about building a bridge. It's about mercy, grace and forgiveness, but it's also about loyalty, boldness and standing alone if need be.

*It's those who crave an audience of many people who start fights with man. Live for an audience of One; yes, to please God instead. —KvS*

<b>Jesus A Man's Man Who Forgives</b>	
<b>Jesus forgave...</b>	<b>Reference</b>
the paralyzed man lowered on a mat through the roof	Matthew 9:2-8
the woman caught in the act of adultery	John 8:3-11
the woman who anointed His feet with costly perfume	Luke 7:47-50
Peter, for denying he even knew Jesus	John 18:15-18, 25-27; 21:15-19
the repentant non-baptized criminal on the cross	Luke 23:39-43
the Romans and other people who crucified Him	Luke 23:34
<p>Jesus not only taught well about forgiveness, He also demonstrated His own willingness to forgive frequently. His repeated example in this area should lend us big encouragement to recognize God's willingness to forgive us also. We extend what we've already received. You must keep all your sins under the blood and forgive all people horizontally in your heart if you want to be used of God to help sinners come to find vertical forgiveness in Jesus.</p>	

### **The Top Boss-Complex**

Employees and leaders in churches should never be envious, jealous or compete with sons of the pastor even if that pastor tries to goad them into competition for numbers. Pastors would be foolish to pressure underling-leaders to populate the lagging unpopular meetings led by their sons just to make it appear like they deserve their higher salary or like God is blessing that person. It would be natural for that pastor to want to brag on his son from the pulpit, but God's work is supernatural. God didn't bring those people into the church for the sole purpose of making still foolish pastor-sons look successful or anointed. Sure it's only right for all leaders to assist and want to help each other in building God's Kingdom no matter who they are, but if huge preferential treatment is already flowing in that offspring's direction the pastor will have problems as he cracks the whip. Helping that kid will often mean job security, but some leaders will still (at the risk of being labeled to congregants "envious" or "bitter") opt to build God's eternal Kingdom before some spoiled son's temporal kingdom. There's a name for such leaders: "unemployed", but if you think about it why be work in a poser church in the first place. Life is too short. Some of these leaders might have worked in other lame churches where all non-family underlings were as expendable as last weeks used Styrofoam cups in the fellowship hall.

Many sons and daughters are in line for the top jobs in churches and in secular companies due their heredity. Sometimes this can work out well for corporations and their staffs and sometimes it does not. Some sons seem to come with their own special problems. Often times their fathers are intensely competitive, viewing their own sons who will potentially succeed them as premature threats or embarrassments, rather than welcome associates. Some fathers grab on tight as they get older. They want to keep running the show when their sons have become better qualified. They somehow don't believe there is life beyond that job. I'm not saying Christians should retire from spreading the Gospel. I'm saying some senior pastors aren't willing to transit at all and it would be unwise for many to. Yet some sons want supreme authority before they've

even developed the character to handle it—before they are qualified or capable of exercising such authority. Most boards with companies are smart enough not to give the top spot on the human level to someone who hasn't earned it or been properly trained for it, so why are many church elders so obtuse? When it's a given as far as the dad is concerned ...that his precious son will be over every employee as the chief boss soon even though the twenty something is newly employed, is still hotheaded and is a new believer fresh off drugs, the other workers could start to view God as preferential like their boss. Human nature whether paternal or non-familial relishes control over people but true Christians and real pastors are to die to this for the betterment of all God's kids.

In the first century there was a man named Diotrephes. It was apparent that his greatest desire was to be the church boss, so what did he do? He simply promoted himself. You know how *money, sex and power* are three areas where many ministers fall and how these areas of worldliness relate to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately we've all heard about many minister scandals. Falling could happen with any of us if we let our guard down. God give grace to the humble.

Well Diotrephes' obsession as far as we can see, began with his hunger for authority (power). Did he want recognition, respect, and control of everyone? Probably. Talk about asking for a church fight? You remember how Lucifer also had such a desire to be the boss in God's Kingdom and he actually put it into motion. He grasped for the top position, but God put him down. Never forget that the way up in God's Kingdom is down (in serving) and the way down is to put yourself up (retiring from all humble serving of others). I'm talking about presumptuous self-promotion. When a saint or a sinner at church is presumptuous regarding power and position, they are just courting contention. The Apostle John wrote to a local church about this self-important officious character in the body who was mistreating other ministers: ***"I wrote unto the church, but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church"*** (3 Jn. 9-10).

Was Diotrephes stubbornly bureaucratic, loving rules and regulations more than people? He probably was. Was he laissez faire permissive in allowing other leaders to share in the church decisions, or was he an iron-fistedly autocrat, a dictatorial-one-man rule? He would appear that he was the later. Now every church needs non-bossy leaders with the gift of governing who have vision from God. Some people make leading look easy. They have a gift for doing it right. They prayerfully set goals, tactfully delegate, implement these objectives in a non-overbearing pushy way, and then they follow through with all these things to completion with the right motives. Sometimes they even stir up a few waves of inflexibility in the process. That's ok.

Diotrephes was flat-out bossy. It seems obvious that he told people what to do, when to do it and if not, where they could go and John knew that drastic action was needed because God wanted the congregants to be able to receive from His ministry through certain leaders and the church boss was blocking this. A letter John wrote to this church about these itinerant ministers had fallen into Diotrephes hands. Magnifying his authority, he haughtily refused to receive these travelers, an insult to the apostle whom they represented. John then wrote the well-loved Gaius,

whose godly walk and generous hospitality was well known, to ask him to welcome these visitors. John actually sticks to the facts and accuses Diotrephes of "**prating**," a word that occurs only here in the New Testament. It carries the idea of boiling-up hollow bubbles. A related adjective that people use is translated "tattlers." Yes, his pretentious poser-words characterized him as a wicked windbag, a blow-gut, who somehow succeeded in getting the majority under his thumb. History retells the story of many men with high-ranking authority that have resented the very presence of even a loyal second-in-command. Diotrephes was like this. He is described as one "**who loveth to have the preeminence.**" In the original language, preeminence is a compound word meaning "**to love to be first.**" This compound word is found here in the New Testament. The second word of this compound, to be first, is used in Colossians 1:18, referring to Christ: "**that in all things He might have the preeminence.**" Jesus Christ alone is to be first and no mere human with him. Church leaders of yesteryear and contemporary ones today will not be sharing the throne that is placed at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

Was Diotrephes vain in his self-seeking? Was he egotistically unreasonable, closed-minded, browbeating and guilty of lording it over God's people? Uh ...yes he was. Who wouldn't rather dwell in a shack than be stuck with this guy?

A Diotrephes-type needs to be dealt with swiftly and firmly. With God all things are possible! Christians need to pray and counteract the king-syndrome that will dissipate energy and resources of the church. A believer offended by an overbearing bossy leader (son, father, usurper whoever) should schedule a private appointment to face the wrongly-dominating person with the evidence of his oppressive words, manipulation and spiritual abuse. If the attempt runs up against a closed-minded self-styled boss' resistance, the person offended must try to find additional witnesses who agree on a need for change in behavior. Some will indeed agree but some will remain too afraid to come out of the woodwork to confront. If a second confrontation (with a witness) produces no remorse, the matter should be taken to the congregation (and if the shortsighted dad-pastor of that church boss is totally for the little napoleon with his inflated skull and all, then you must vote with your feet). The board of elders or the pastor (or hopefully all of them together with the Lord) will have to choose the kind of leadership the church needs.

Did Diotrephes prefer his brothers ahead of himself or consider others as worthy of greater honor? No.

And Paul told us Christians how to be, "**in honor preferring one another**" (Rom.12:10). And, "**In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves**" (Phil. 2:3). Jesus taught us not to quickly claim honor by choosing the best seat at a dinner. Take a lower spot. Jesus taught us that if deliberately seek the top spot, the brightest limelight, the best office ...we might soon be asked to step down and take a more humiliating spot. If we choose to take the lowest place, we might be promoted. Why find yourself do to a bad decision "out of your our depth" with lots of problems that will steel your joy? There are dedicated and undedicated people in God's Kingdom with varying levels of rank and stature and we would do well to recognize this without seeking recognition unilaterally.

Rhetorical questions might help you think. What if you were basically an observer in this church not getting sinned against unlike the others? And you saw one congregant make an appointment

after another with the pastor to appeal to a man who was like an intentionally deaf Diotrephes, only to see him humor them with feigned words of understanding as he would continue to get his way by putting more ministers out the door. How would you deal with it? Would you never act or leave, but keep trusting God to convert the sicko into a trustworthy saint? What if Diotrephes was an influential board member that could vote out a decent pastor who was committed to teaching the Word and living the life? That happens pretty often.

Was unrepentant Diotrephes the senior pastor or the head of a committee? The Bible doesn't say. What if he was the cruel unrepentant son of the pastor that was headed south spiritually because he was always protected by a bishop? What if John wasn't there and the next authority over the pastor lived three days away, but didn't know the real situation and of course couldn't act on hear-say. It wouldn't be logical to act when it was merely one leader's words against another's and the other ousted ministers were too brokenhearted to say anything. They'd already witnessed his smear jobs. What if closed Diotrephes was the bishop himself? Would you stick it out and never confront or leave? What if he was lost and promoting humanistic or new age teachings? What if the people that John wrote to were for some reason unable to bring about change in the church to see Diotrephes turn or exit? God sees and He will lead you out. Why dry and die as the legend-in-his-own-mind pokes more leaders in the eye?

Herr Goethe and Herr Beethoven were both out for a stroll one day. Wherever they went people pointed them out, and Goethe commented, *"Isn't it maddening? I simply cannot escape this homage!"* But Beethoven replied, *"Don't be too much distressed by it; it is just possible that some of it may be for me."* It's natural for men to become self-assertive; self focused and self exalting, but a spiritual man controlled by the Holy Spirit's will choose to become humble.

Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God. Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will. —Jonathan Edwards

All of us are called to be submitted to authority at all times short of sinning ...under Direct Authority (God, who will never tell you to sin) or under delegated authority (carnal people, spiritual people and sometimes lost people who claim to be spiritual). Submission is a voluntary thing. In Christ it has to do with displaying modesty, a non-hubris willingness to serve, a gentle that's easy to be entreated, a forbearing demeanor that's genuinely grateful with contentment.

Such attitudes can eliminate church fights. They reduce the friction of Christian interaction and they contribute a great deal to a healthy church's peace, order and unity. No one, including pastors or their offspring, should be exempt from accountability to some other person or to a board that really has the power to remove them (not just the appearance of having such a board) if that pastor were to go off into left field teaching-wise or practice-wise. Where there is submission on both sides of an issue in God's church, there is dignity not forceful debasing and subjugation. There is unity and harmony. In an era of independent leaders, how needed is a reminder of the importance of mutual freewill subordination to fellow believers. It works in the home, so why wouldn't in work in God's house?

A Collection Of Different Attitudes	
<b>To the expert in religious law</b>	the wounded man was a subject to discuss.
<b>To the bandits...</b>	the wounded man was someone to use and exploit.
<b>To the religious men...</b>	the wounded man was a problem to be avoided.
<b>To the innkeeper...</b>	the wounded man was a customer to serve for a fee.
<b>To the Samaritan...</b>	the wounded man was a human being worth being cared for and loved.
<b>To Jesus...</b>	all of them and all of us were worth serving and dying for.
Confronting the needs of others brings out various attitudes in each of us. Jesus used the story of the good but despised Samaritan to make clear what attitude was acceptable to Him. If we are honest, we might find ourselves from time to time in the place of that expert in religious law, needing to learn again who our neighbor really is. Note these different attitudes toward the wounded man.	

Are you called to hold tenaciously to your *own* opinions, your *own* preferences and your *own* plans regardless of what the Bible says?—regardless of what others are feeling?—regardless if an ugly church fight is incited? No!

Though claiming to hold to "the principles" of the matter, it's natural for people to defend their own prestige, image, status, position and personal views in an unwillingness to submit to one another in love. But God's work is completed supernaturally. And that's how He expects us to work together with Him—not naturally. By agape love Christians can serve one another in unity (see Gal. 5:13).

It is a fact of Christian experience that life is a series of troughs and peaks. In his efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, God relies on the troughs more than the peaks. And some of his special favorites have gone through longer and deeper troughs than anyone else.  
—Peter Marshall

Jesus' disciples even displayed the Diotrephes-syndrome on at least three occasions by heatedly arguing about which of them deserved the top-dog spot in Christ's coming Kingdom. The first time this happened, Jesus' response was to place a young child right in front of their faces and then exhort His disciples towards childlike faith and humility (Mk. 9:33-37). If God promises to meet all our needs what is there to fight over?

On the next occasion, Jesus pointed out how lost secular leaders regularly seek for the number one position in order to wield power. It's a pride-thing. But in Christ's circle of love the leader needs the opposite motive. It's to be a humility-thing. He said, "***Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.***" Minister simply means an altruistic willing servant. Then to contrast those selfish aspirations of

His disciples, Jesus gave an example of His own others-orientated-service for the Father's glory. He said, *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10:43-45).

The third instance occurred in the Upper Room with the murder of Jesus less than twenty four hours away. The disciples should have been thinking about other things, but they were busy fighting over who should rank the highest in the coming eternal monarchy. Not good timing. They should have been all about extending the courtesy of dirty foot washing. Though basin and towel had been provided, no aspiring disciple felt he should abdicate his own arguments, rights and debate. They each hoped for preeminence instead of dealing with scummy toe-jam.

Jesus rose to give a powerful illustrated sermon, demonstrating graphically the Message that should have ended a follower's brainless lust for the boss' office. The Lord of Glory, at whose beck literally legions of angels would immediately respond, chose the servant's role and took the soiled feet of His followers in His own hands. He declared, *"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet"* (Jn. 13:14). His action told His followers to seek service, not the top seat, seek loving sincerity not luxurious sovereignty. Even though the Bible never tells us that Jesus did carpentry work—He probably did. Yes it was this Man who was more than likely a blue collar worker when He was young that made forever noble the order of practical work on behalf of others.

All three of these recorded power-struggles among Christ's disciples, as to which one should be greatest, occurred right after Jesus had spoken of His coming death, burial, and future Kingdom. Somehow their thoughts slid past the Cross to dwell on the crowns, past the slime to hyper-focus on the splendor, past the passion to mere politicking. Amazing! Are we any better? It all motivated them to ask for positions of honor at a time of homicidal horror.

But even for us with our contemporary vantage point. We can so quickly care about our own importance, our own Kingdom rights, our own self-esteem, dignity, position and authority! We can crave preeminence, power and popularity. We can hunger for having our own way like a baby, or we can look away to Calvary to behold the non-bossy One who decided to die for me and me.

*When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. -Isaac Watts*

Maybe you've been a street fighter? Maybe you've fleshed-out and instigated some hurtful brawls at church? God still loves you, but repent. Stop it! Allow Christ to take the war out of your heart. The Psalmist says of Jesus, *"He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* (Ps. 46:9-10 nkjv).

Become a peacemaker. Jesus Christ went to the cross to do peacemaking vertically and subsequently horizontally. Some might choose to always hate you, but you can forgive and love them. He who was without sin became sin for us. He took our sin upon Himself. The heart of the

Gospel, which the Church throughout the ages has been called to boldly proclaim until Christ returns to earth, is that Jesus died vicariously (in our place) when we were still enemies who were at odds with our Maker.

Have you somehow gotten out of fellowship with the Lord? Maybe you need to recommit your life to Christ. The cross is our security and our assurance. Our salvation depends on one fact: Jesus Christ died for rebellious fighters like us.

The Christian life is a dynamic life that we must live in His power not our own. It is not something that is static, something that stays still and never moves. You're either going forward spiritually with Christ or going backwards—no in-between. God's desire is to mold and to shape you into conformity with the ultimate Peacemaker. Jesus was willing to let people fight against Him without lifting a fist in return, taking upon Himself the judgment so that we sinners might never face the judgment of hell that we deserve! This was costly grace; it cost our Savior all.

You might be asking, "*Kurt, what specifically does God want me, a contentiously fighting Christian, to do to get right with Him? How should I respond to God?*"

I would say do what the Beatle's sang when Paul McCartney and John Lennon belted out: *Get back, get back. Get back to where you once belonged. Get back, get back Get back to where you once belonged. Get back Jojo!*"

Here are the "*Three Rs of Recommitment.*" We can apply these steps from what we find in the book of Revelation: *Remember, Repent and Repeat!*

Jesus lovingly challenged the wayward Christians at the church of Ephesus saying, "***I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works***" (Rev 2:4-5). Do you remember all those things you did to find edification when you were a new baby in the Lord? You went to multiple Bible studies, pancake-breakfast-prayer-meetings, all nights of prayer, and sound church services each week. You loved to have quiet time all alone in the Word every day and prayed like you really meant it. You would stay up all night reading good Christian books and hearing tapes—you were both an excited bookworm and a tape worm! You started experiencing so much joy that you would find yourself witnessing to your lost friends and this even built you up. You would drive many miles to go pick up friends to take with you to church. Hey, go do all those things again—a whole lot, until you are a strong believer again. This I say, "***He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully***" (2 Cor. 9:6). Sow to the Spirit aggressively with discipline ...not to the flesh, just a like prize fighter would train for the big match, but without socking people! Your real fight isn't against flesh and blood! Daily win the victory over your old nature, the world and the minions of hell.

Perhaps you're not even sure if you've ever been right with God or [really saved](#).

Here's some more "Rs" for you if you desire to have Jesus Christ fully forgive you and make you a real Christian.

I call these: *"The Seven 'Rs' of regeneration."*

1. *Recognize that you are a sinner* (admit your need).
2. *Repent of your sin* (be willing to hang a 180 degree turn away from a life of sin to Jesus).
3. *Realize that Jesus Christ died in your place on Calvary's Cross and rose from the grave.*
4. *Receive Jesus as Lord into your life by faith, so He can begin to empower and control you through His Spirit.*
5. *Resolve to do it publicly. Everyone, who Jesus called, He called openly and publicly.*
6. *Respond to Christ now! **Be born again.** Why NOW? Because God says now—TODAY is the day of salvation, NOW is the acceptable time. The Devil will say "Mañana" (tomorrow), but Jesus says today - right now.*
7. *Rejoice in Jesus, thanking Him for what He has done!*

Fights don't typically start with fists flying in the air and total strangers. They start neglect of God's Word, with neglect of humbly inquiring of the Lord about matters. They start with attitudes that turn into offensive words. **Loose lips sink ships!** Remember, you are now dead to the wrong type of fighting. It's all been nailed to His cross. Earnest prayerful meditation upon the cross of Christ and upon verses that could help you will continue to quell any desire for people domination.

**Here's Some Verses To Meditate Upon:**

*"A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again."* (Proverbs 19:19 nas).

*"People with quick tempers will have to pay for it. If you help them out once, you will have to do it again."* (ncv)

*"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again."* (kjv).

*"A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again."* (niv)

*"Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul"* (Proverbs 22:24-25 nkjv).

*"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered"* (Proverbs 22:24-25 niv).

*"An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression"* (Proverbs 29:22 nas).

*"A wise man restrains his anger and overlooks insults. This is to his credit"* (Proverbs 19:11 tlb).

*"The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression"* (nkjv).

*"He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning"* (Proverbs 9:7-9).

***"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins"***(Proverbs 10:12).

Titus 3:9-11 ***But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.***

Proverbs 6:14 ***A worthless person... Perversity is in his heart, He devises evil continually, He sows discord.***

Proverbs 18:6 ***A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes.*** KJV

Proverbs 22:10 ***Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.*** KJV

Proverbs 6:19 ***A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.***

Proverbs 17:19 ***Anyone who loves to quarrel loves sin; anyone who speaks boastfully invites disaster.***

Proverbs 17:14 ***Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.***

James 4:2 ***You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.***

Ps. 106:32 ***They angered Him also at the waters of strife.***

Proverbs 10:12 ***Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.***

Proverbs 13:10 ***By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.***

Proverbs 15:18 ***A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.***

Proverbs 16:28 ***A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.***

Proverbs 17:1 ***Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.***

Proverbs 17:14 ***The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.***

Proverbs 17:19 ***He who loves transgression loves strife, and he who exalts his gate seeks destruction.***

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Proverbs 17:19 ***He who loves transgression loves strife, and he who exalts his gate seeks destruction.***

Proverbs 22:10 ***Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave; yes, strife and reproach will cease.***

Proverbs 26:20 ***Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.***

Proverbs 26:21 ***As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.***

Proverbs 28:25 *He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered.*

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

Proverbs 30:33 *For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife.*

### **Proverbs against Fleshing-out from the Message Bible:**

*3:30-32 "Don't walk around with a chip on your shoulder, always spoiling for a fight. Don't try to be like those who shoulder their way through life. Why be a bully?"*

*9:7-9 "If you reason with an arrogant cynic, you'll get slapped in the face; confront bad behavior and get a kick in the shins. So don't waste your time on a scoffer; all you'll get for your pains is abuse. But if you correct those who care about life, that's different—they'll love you for it! Save your breath for the wise—they'll be wiser for it"*

*11:12 "Mean-spirited slander is heartless; quiet discretion accompanies good sense."*

*12:23 "Prudent people don't flaunt their knowledge; talkative fools broadcast their silliness."*

*14:6b-7 "the open-minded find it right on their doorstep! Escape quickly from the company of fools; they're a waste of your time, a waste of your words."*

*14:28 "The mark of a good leader is loyal followers; leadership is nothing without a following."*

*15:4 "Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim."*

*16:14 "An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives; you're smart to stay clear of someone like that."*

*16:28-29 "Troublemakers start fights; gossips break up friendships. Calloused climbers betray their very own friends; they'd stab their own grandmothers in the back."*

*17:15 "Whitewashing bad people and throwing mud on good people are equally abhorrent to God."*

*18:5-7 "The words of a fool start fights; do him a favor and gag him. Fools are undone by their big mouths."*

*18:13 "Answering before listening is both stupid and rude."*

*18:21 "Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose."*

*19:11-12 Smart people know how to hold their tongue; their grandeur is to forgive and forget. Mean-tempered leaders are like mad dogs."*

*19:16 "Keep the rules and keep your life; careless living kills."*

*20:2-3 "Quick-tempered leaders are like mad dogs—cross them and they bite your head off. It's a mark of good character to avert quarrels, but fools love to pick fights."*

*21:23 "Watch your words and hold your tongue; you'll save yourself a lot of grief."*

*21:27 "Religious performance by the wicked stinks; it's even worse when they use it to get ahead."*

*22:1 "A gracious spirit is better than money in the bank."*

*22:10 "Kick out the troublemakers and things will quiet down."*

***22:24-25 "Don't hang out with angry people; don't keep company with hotheads. Bad temper is contagious—don't get infected. "***

***26:4-5 "Don't respond to the stupidity of a fool; you'll only look foolish yourself. Answer a fool in simple terms"***

***26:8 "Putting a fool in a place of honor is like setting a mud brick on a marble column."***

***28:2-3 "... it takes a leader of real understanding to straighten things out. The wicked who oppress the poor are like a hailstorm that beats down the harvest."***

***29:4 "A leader of good judgment gives stability; an exploiting leader leaves a trail of waste."***

***29:22-23 "Angry people stir up a lot of discord; the intemperate stir up trouble. Pride lands you flat on your face."***

***30:32-33 "If you're dumb enough to call attention to yourself by offending people and making rude gestures, don't be surprised if someone bloodies your nose."***

***31:4 "Leaders can't afford to make fools of themselves."***

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<sup>1</sup> a.k.a. Greek discussions and genealogies.

<sup>2</sup> Here's two books to read: *The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham* by Harold Myra and Marshall Shelley (Published 2005 Zondervan, ISBN:0310255783). Also read: *Well-Intentioned Dragons: Ministering to Problem People in the Church* by Marshall Shelley (Publisher: Bethany House Date Published: 1994 ISBN-13: 9781556615153 ISBN: 1556615159).

<sup>3</sup> See First John 2:16.